

The Effect of Mentoring on the Longevity of a Law Enforcement Career

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Abstract

Law enforcement agencies across the country are facing struggles with manpower which impacts the quality and services they provide to their communities. These agencies are taking varying approaches to combat manpower shortages. This research paper is designed to review retention initiative such as mentorship programs. Through the research we observe the impact that leadership can have on morale, recruitment, development, and retention of personnel in law enforcement agencies. As law enforcement, we must look at ways to boost morale and provide officers the support they need so they can continue the path of their law enforcement careers. Implementing a mentoring program could be the answer to this problem. The impact on the agency, budget, mentors, and mentees were examined to determine if this is a viable option.

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Leaders at law enforcement agencies across the country must look at ways to improve the work environment for their employees. From 2008 till 2018, the number of law enforcement officers per-capita declined by 8%. According to Charles Fain Lehman (2020), the Nashville Police Department reported 4700 applicants in 2010 and only 1900 in 2018; Seattle Police Department reported a 40-50% drop in applicants; and the Jefferson County, Colorado reported a 70% drop in applicants. Given these statistics, it is also timely and expensive to replace law enforcement officers. Brett Meade (n. d) states, “Costs are always a concern, as standard cost to recruit, hire, equip, and fully train a police officer from the time they submit their initial application to the time they can function independently may exceed \$100,000 and take up to eighteen months.” (para. 2).

According to Charles Fain Lehman (2020), “In total, 86 percent of police chiefs nationwide reported a shortage of sworn officers, with nearly half stating that the shortage had worsened over the past five years.” (para. 3) Not only are agencies receiving fewer applicants than in the past, but also officers are leaving law enforcement at a higher rate than in the past, leaving manpower shortages. Officers voluntarily leaving agencies have given several reasons for leaving, such as relationships with supervisors, agency morale, and agency support. With these facts to consider, it is imperative that programs are implemented in law enforcement agencies to promote a positive culture and helps build an environment that officers do not want to leave.

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The research paper is organized as follows: First, we discuss varying programs and literature on the subject of mentorship in law enforcement and retention of personnel. Then, we discuss how this has caused agencies to change their approach on hiring and training. Finally, we conclude on how a positive mentor program could affect an agency and its ability to serve its community.

Review of Literature

Impact and Implementation of a Mentoring Program

Implementing a mentoring program could be a viable option to help build a positive culture at a law enforcement agency. Every agency should have an established Field Training Officer (FTO) Program, which trains new officers on the daily tasks and knowledge needed to operate as a law enforcement officer. A mentor can continue the process by helping lead and advise officers in other aspects of life and work, including advice into training that should be attended, available career paths within the agency, and steps needed to be taken to realize goals within the agency. According to Sgt. Aaron Birmingham (2013), “The mentor is expected to pass on knowledge of subjects, facilitate personal development, encourage wise choices, and help protégé to make transitions.” (para. 5). An officer with a mentor will have support and may realize opportunities that they otherwise would not have realized were possible. Having a support system and someone to talk problems over with can help raise morale. As stated by Julie Williams (2000), “Mentoring operates on the assumption that people relate more readily and positively to peer assistance than to supervisory direction. It provides a nonthreatening

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environment for learning and growth to occur.” (p. 20). Also, seasoned officers tasked with acting as a mentor will have a new purpose and will get experience working as a leader. This could also boost morale for seasoned officers and assist in developing them as leaders. James E. Edmunson stated (1999), “Although the primary intent of mentoring is the benefits of the recruit, substantial benefits can accrue to the mentor and the department.”

Mentors should be selected from the top performers of the agency on a voluntary basis. For an employee to truly benefit from the program, the mentor must be willing to help and have the best interest of the mentee and the agency at heart. This is an opportunity for the mentor to grow as a leader and be a part of the process that builds a better agency for law enforcement officers in the future, showing legacy leadership. Chief Gary Blakenship (2017) stated the best way to learn something is to teach it to someone else. The mentor and mentee will also both benefit from mutual feedback. Feedback is very important for our ability to grow as leaders and leave a positive legacy. Feedback helps you learn what can be improved and how you can do things better, therefore people should feel that you are open to feedback. Any fear of retribution as relates to giving feedback will hamper your growth as a leader. Furthermore, it will allow problems to grow, which could lead to an ineffective work environment. According to Chief Gary Blankenship (2017), “Setting up an environment of regular feedback and paying attention to it will reveal issues before they become serious problems.” Regular feedback only helps to improve leaders, each other, and the agency as whole. Not only will the employees benefit, the mentors benefit and the agency will improve as a whole. A mentor program should cost the agency little to no money. If a mentor program is successful in leading to the retention of only

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one officer, the agency could save up to \$100,000.00, eighteen months in training, and numerous years of experience.

Due to subjectivity of the benefits of a mentoring program and the scarcity of mentoring programs in law enforcement, scientific data on the benefits and negative aspects are not available. The only real negative aspects of the mentoring program could be from the mentors themselves if they are not committed to the program. This would leave the agency in no different position than not having a mentoring program at all. With no real cost associated and no real potential for negative effects, it could only benefit an agency by implementing a mentoring program.

Institutionalizing Mentoring into Police Departments

A mentoring program is a necessity for the development of new officers. Mentoring is described as a mutually beneficial relationship in which a knowledgeable and skilled veteran officer provides insight, guidance, and development opportunities to a lesser skilled and experienced colleague (Sprafka & Kranda, n.d.). Different types of mentoring applications have been known throughout history, which applied the same concept. Unfortunately, most of these types of mentoring situations were adequate but not organized. To organize a mentoring program, an organization needs to meet three goals: Promote professional growth, inspire personal motivation, and enhance the effectiveness of police service (Sprafka & Kranda, n.d.). In a formalized mentoring program, these goals can be monitored to ensure proper execution and reception, which would adequately accomplish these goals. In an article written by Chief Sprafka

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and Lieutenant Kranda (n.d.), we learn several benefits found in a mentoring program. To our surprise, these benefits listed were not the benefits to the protégé but the mentor.

Through experience as Field Training Officers, we found a mentor program quality, senior officers who are knowledgeable and talented in their profession are recruited to mentor incoming new officers. These officers will also receive benefits through this program: Mentors will be personally rewarded for developing talent. These mentors will feel a sense of pride in developing these young officers and feel they are a part of their contributions to the department.

Mentors will benefit from the continuing self-education in policies, procedures, and policing practices. They will self-develop as they need to remain current with the agency's protocols, not to mention the repetitive explanation to new officers will help retain this information. Mentors will be leaving their legacy through the advancement of others they have mentored.

The feeling of being valued by their agency for this contribution of passing down their knowledge will also positively affect the mentor. This will lead to the mentor continuing to thrive and continue to develop themselves while developing others for the benefit of all involved, including the agency. The mentor at this point practices servant leadership. According to Lt. Col. R'ami Spain (2017), "Certain leaders make dreams happen they were willing to sacrifice the conventional ways and victory and seek the greatest good servant leaders exist for the sake of others the wisdom that these boys had in making this world a better place." There are many reasons why a mentor would wish to follow this path. Chief Sprafka and Lieutenant Kranda (n.d.) tell us that frequently people become mentors because they were previously

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protégés who had a great experience building these relationships with their mentor. Others become mentors because they see the value in this type of environment and wish they would have participated in a similar program during their career (Sprafka & Kranda, n.d.). Many other reasons exist; however, the benefits to the agency and satisfaction to the mentor are undeniable.

According to Chief Sprafka and Lieutenant Kranda (n.d.), several benefits to the protégé also exist. By having a mentor program, new officers are placed in a setting conducive to success. New officers gain knowledge in the agency's working through their mentor, avoiding a trial-and-error situation where new officers learn by failure. The new officer will be assisted in setting goals leading to the career path he desires within the agency. By the mentor learning the interest of the new officer, the mentor can help the officer reach that goal. The mentor can provide new opportunities in career paths that the new officer did not know were available. Mentors can also offer new officers real-life experiences with lessons they have learned that new officers can avoid. New officers can feel a sense of worth not only to the mentor but also to the agency. This can prove essential when it comes to retention. The mentor can also provide a morale and confidence booster. A new officer will have personal feedback on their progression and adjustments without a negative experience.

As mentioned earlier, mentoring is not a new concept. However, most mentoring throughout history has not involved a formal, organized program. A proper, organized program can be beneficial to an agency as opposed to an informal mentorship. During a formal mentoring program, all new officers receive the benefits of being mentored through their experience in the agency. According to our experience formalization brings structure to a program. This will also

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promote agency loyalty and inclusiveness. Each mentor will know their set goals within the program. The mentor program would have structure, and proper procedures would be followed. All mentors will understand what their responsibilities are and will communicate expectations to their protégé.

This mentor program would be different from a field training program. “The role of a mentor and the field training officer are distinct, yet complement each other,” (Sprafka & Kranda, n.d.). Although both complement each other, the role of an FTO is to train a new officer and prepare him to be an effective law enforcement officer. The role of the mentor is to continue his development after the FTO program and build a relationship and support the new officer. The mentor's job is not to evaluate the new officer but to transition into his new environment. This unique mentorship begins before the first appointment of hire and long after completion of his field training. This program will further help enhance the agency's culture of legacy leadership as it will have knowledgeable senior leaders creating and enhancing others producing a leadership-rich environment.

Mentoring for Law Enforcement

Law enforcement professionals can expect an array of challenges ahead when beginning their careers. Stereotypes and negative generalization are to be expected from bias media sources and a uniformed public. Law enforcement agencies strive to provide resources that help to combat, and perhaps reduce, the negative experiences that new employees must endure. Efforts have been made throughout the nation to develop and provide training that aids in

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preparing new officers to cope and manage the challenges that they will face after choosing to become a part of the family of Law Enforcement. During the quest to provide avenues to aid new Officers in coping with the challenges today's law enforcement faces, it seems that one tool has been undervalued. While focusing on data and conducting research, the most intimate of resources has often been overlooked. The resource that is the "Mentor".

A mentor is another law enforcement professional that has already endured and experienced the challenges and biasness that new officers are likely to encounter. Mentors can provide personal information as a result of experience, rather than experiments. Research has shown that the mentor-protégé relationship undeniably is one of the most developmentally important professional relationships a person can have (Williams, 2000). Both the new employee and the mentor, reap positive results from this type of intimate exchange. It is important that mentors are chosen carefully and demonstrate the ability to offer guidance and counseling. Williams (2000) explained, the relationship between a mentor and protégé should not be limited to policies, rules, and guidelines. Mentors must be prepared to serve as vessels that help to filter negative emotions experienced by a protégé both on and off the job. In our opinion a successful mentor must be adaptable, understanding, reliable, and possess a strong knowledge within their profession. Oftentimes, law enforcement agencies face the challenge of assigning individuals who possess these qualities to the role of mentor. Individuals that meet the criteria needed to perform well as a mentor are often promoted or assigned to administrative roles. The role of FTO is often the transition to the role of mentor. A mentoring program cannot succeed without support from all levels of the organization. It is the duty of upper-level administration to

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recognize the value and importance of a mentoring program, thus allocating qualified individuals to programs such as field training officer and mentor.

When developing a mentoring program, leaders must recognize how critical it is for the relationship between the mentor and protégé to continue beyond probationary periods.

Mentoring programs should be intended to develop relationships that do not expire based on position within the organization. Properly chosen FTO's and mentors should be prepared to provide practical and emotional support to trainees throughout his/her career. Organizations must attempt to identify certain character traits when selecting mentors, but also develop and provide formal training for these individuals. Communication is the heart of a good mentoring program, and individuals that demonstrate a high level of emotional intelligence have proven to be successful as mentors. A mentor must have the ability as a leader to identify, assess, and control the emotions of themselves and others.

Mentor as Leader

Leaders in any capacity should exhibit emotional intelligence through self-awareness and empathy. A very desirable trait possessed by individuals in FTO and mentoring positions is that of a legacy leader that considers succession planning within the organization. Ideally, mentors will identify and strive to create individuals that may one day replace them. Mentors should meet and communicate with their protégé without prompting and remain open to criticism. The role of a mentor includes providing clearly identified and measurable goals, then utilizing a performance evaluation to provide feedback to the individual to minimize uncertainty. Standards and expectations must be specific and measurable (Normore, 2017). Tools such as goal setting

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should be utilized by mentors to show their protégé what behaviors will lead to their desired outcome. Leadership positions, such as the role of mentor, come with the obligation to make new employees feel like winners, and provide candid feedback and support. Mentors that utilize self-disclosure aid in building trust and developing a productive relationship.

Mentoring should continue beyond a new employee training phase to strengthen employee retention and professional growth. As Field Training Officers, we believe mentoring programs benefit all members of an organization, even those that are not directly involved with the program. Successful implementation of a mentoring program can produce deep change within agencies. Retaining employees for longer periods pays forward efficiency throughout other departments within organizations. We believe positive results achieved via mentoring programs feed forward throughout organizations.

The field of law enforcement continues to grow and evolve. To promote healthy work environments and retain qualified individuals, relationships between mentors and their protégé must not expire. Mentoring and peer support should reflect relationships that continue indefinitely. The ability to identify the goals of new employees and pair them with a leader that has achieved similar goals, has a positive impact on morale and employee retention. The development of a successful mentoring program should include additional training and continuing education for mentors and FTO's. Agencies who value the importance of a mentoring program are obligated to recognize the need to continue developing current leaders, so that they may develop new leaders in return.

Conclusion

In summary, retention of personnel in law enforcement along with personnel performance are closely related to the morale and leadership of the agency. Many agencies have utilized social media platforms to better recruit applicants. The largest demographic of new officers comes from Generation Y also known as Millennials per Lorraine Snyder (2017a). Millennials respond best to mentorship and assertive communication including answering the reasoning behind policies. Once an officer is recruited to an agency training of the officer through an FTO program is standard practice. What is not standard practice was how to keep the officer in the agency and positively engaged.

The development of a mentorship program has a direct correlation to the improvement of morale and retention. Many of the smaller and more rural agencies have restrictions on hiring based on geographical areas such as within their own jurisdiction. This makes the application pool smaller and makes it even more important to retain every quality applicant and recruit. All agencies lose personnel for varying reasons such as: retirement, injury, and dissatisfaction. However, keeping officers longer by increasing their satisfaction and morale grants a better return on investment. Developing officers through leadership education, skill development, and mentoring increases morale and productivity for the agency. Improving the organization's culture through positive interactions and positive relationships improves the agency's wellbeing. This produces officers that are more resilient and professional which increases the agencies effectiveness within their community. Officers also need to have a strong moral compass in order

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to be successful as discussed by Lorraine Snyder (2017b), “The moral compass 4 points: Peace, Equity, Justice and Service. These cornerstones serve as anchors that will guide the law enforcement officer with confidence on the path towards their destination as credible leaders within their agencies, communities and personal lives.” Mentorship demonstrates a positive moral compass as mentors and mentees discuss their decisions and how they were made. Experienced mentors guide their mentees to avoid poor choices and encourage positive decisions. Mentors and mentees are both empowered to set their own goals and develop positive interoffice relationships.

Mentors are de facto leaders and agents of change within an agency once a formalized program is instituted. The mentors are then responsible for utilizing the Transforming Leadership Skills to assess their mentee and coach them into becoming effective leaders themselves. The mentorship program once instituted needs to be organized so that the agency can closely monitor it so that progress remains within the overall vision of the agency. The agency will then adapt and change as the leadership flourishes improving the morale and culture.

Based upon the research we conducted implementing a mentorship program will best be done formally. The support from the administration of an agency is paramount for the success of a mentorship program and directly affects the effectiveness. Guidelines tracking mentors and mentees as well as career goals. The utilization of goal setting and career paths is necessary for developing leaders and professional officers. Developing personnel as the key resource and understanding officers being hired now are the future of the agency and law enforcement in general. Developing those officers through a formal program ensures positive legacies and

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succession planning. Without the ability to retain and develop these officers, agencies will continue to shrink and lose services. Agencies missing manpower reduce services such as community policing and fall to reactionary policing rather than proactive service and community relations.

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