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Mentoring: Nourishing the Organizational Culture

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Mentoring requires effort, patience, and commitment. However, like most

challenging endeavors, its rewards far exceed its tribulations. Mentoring can be refreshingly nourishing to an organization and give it a boost to achieve greatness. If utilized genuinely, consistently, and strategically, it can remedy many organizational problems and provide an enriched work environment.

Mentoring benefits for protégés include

- increased likelihood for success, as mentors help protégés gain competency and avoid failure;
- assistance in setting goals and charting career paths;
- encouragement and opportunities for new experiences and professional growth
- help to avoid pitfalls and learn through real-life examples;
- enhancement of feelings of worth to the mentor and the organization; and
- support to foster self-confidence by cheering achievements.

Many successful people attribute their achievements to a mentoring relationship. The first step toward institutionalizing mentoring in an agency is mentoring of new employees.¹

The reciprocating benefits of a formal mentoring program cannot be overemphasized. Committed mentors usually find the opportunity rewarding and contributory. Mentors also play a significant role in crisis prevention, and effective mentors can help prevent misconduct. Mentors can teach members of an agency how to prepare for challenges in a healthy, constructive manner. A summary of benefits for mentors follow:

- Mentors are personally rewarded for spotlighting and developing talent.
- Mentors must be knowledgeable of department policies, procedures, and contemporary policing practices, and mentoring reinforces that knowledge.
- Mentors pave the way for others, thereby leaving their legacies in the department.
- Mentors are viewed as valuable in the organization and are respected by colleagues.
- Mentors obtain varying perspectives from their protégés, which generates creativity.
- Mentors reap the reward of feeling good about themselves by helping others.

“Frequently, people become mentors because they were previously protégés who experienced the rewards of a mentoring relationship. Others become mentors because they wished a mentor had been available to them during their careers. Whatever the reason, mentors derive great satisfaction from seeing a colleague succeed because of their efforts.”²

Formal mentoring programs can have their shortcomings, as good chemistry in the mentoring relationship cannot be guaranteed. Some formal pairings are simply not going to work. Nevertheless, this should not prevent the attempt, nor does it overshadow the larger message being sent to each employee: Everybody has value and has a right and a need to contribute, both organizationally and socially. Mentoring guides employees in achieving this message and reinforces an organizational belief. Employees are more likely to remain loyal and committed to an organization that has demonstrated a belief in them. This can be achieved with a consistent and sincere recognition of employee contributions and potential. Great mentoring leaders understand this concept. They genuinely care about their people and their development. Because of this, mentors know how to encourage others to perform at their highest potential. The best leaders teach their protégés to repeat this process and mentor others.

When protégés repay the organization by becoming mentors themselves, the cycle enables mentoring as a part of the department’s culture.

Mentoring as Part of the Culture

Max De Pree, the longtime chief executive officer of the Herman Miller furniture company, talks about the importance of what he calls “tribal storytelling.”³ Every police agency has its very own historical context, value system, and stories that give employees a unique sense of organizational pride. “Tribal elders,” or agency employees with the most seniority, must routinely share these stories and their significance with others so the culture remains vibrant and purposeful. Effective mentors can and should be these tribal storytellers.

Mentoring must be an organizational endeavor that becomes part of the agencies’ culture. Positive mentoring behavior needs to be embraced and modeled by the management team. It begins with an agency’s leadership as a skill that can and must be learned. Top organizational leaders must expose their leadership teams to mentoring learning opportunities so the practice becomes a prevailing and enduring cultural assumption.

Leadership focuses more on followers than it does on leaders. U.S. Coast Guard Captain Bruce Jones articulated this best when he spoke of his organization’s acclaimed response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster. “It’s not about the plan,” he said. “It’s not about organizational charts. It’s not about your processes. It’s about your people and your leadership. It’s about organizational culture. That’s what’s important.”⁴

Leaders have a responsibility to create a culture that supports and develops the careers of their personnel. Leaders who routinely invest in employee relationships and remain committed to their employees will also experience a followership that is committed to a shared purpose. In his definitive work on followership, Ira Chaleff states that followers and leaders should be orbiting around the common purpose, not around the leader.⁵

There is a sharp distinction between average leaders who attract followers (see figure 1) and great leaders who attract other leaders (see figure 2). Mentoring leaders not only want to succeed; they desire to replicate themselves, share

power, and invest time in others. This is the very essence of creating leadership and mentoring at every level of the organization—and the reason why leaders must create a mentoring environment. All organizations are comprised of various levels and departments that should be working toward a common goal. Without mentoring leaders who are attracting and developing other leaders throughout the organization, these other levels will destructively compete against one another—or worse, decline into mediocrity. An organization cannot reach its full potential of greatness until its people are inspired to work toward theirs. Leaders who strive to create a mentoring environment clearly understand this dynamic.

Organizational Structure and Culture Considerations

Understanding an organization's structural design is critical when implementing a mentoring program. Many agencies use organizational charts that emphasize hierarchy and chain of command. This design can lack interconnectivity among work groups. Often, the only portion of the chart with any interconnectivity is at the very top and this can discourage participation at lower levels (see figure 3). This does not mean a structural overhaul must be made prior to a mentoring program. Rather, it is done to illustrate limitations and challenges that may be faced when introducing formal mentoring in this environment.

As an example, compare the chart in figure 3 with the one in figure 4. The later reflects a more contemporary and participative model and sends a powerful message that the organization is willing to evolve and engage its employees.

If structural design is the framework of an organization, culture is its very DNA. Organizational culture is a pattern of shared assumptions learned by a group as its members work through various problems.⁶ For a mentoring program to be accepted and successful, it must offer something that is lacking in the existing culture. Understanding the differences between organizational artifacts, espoused beliefs, and underlying assumptions will assist in successfully establishing a mentoring program in the existing culture.

Artifacts. Artifacts are the tangible objects of an organization. Examples include architecture; interior design; trophies; organizational charts; dress codes; acceptable language; and behavior. One can draw certain conclusions about an organization's culture by looking at artifacts. However, these conclusions may be inaccurate because they are merely superficial projections of personal reactions. One must be cognizant of artifacts but cannot rely upon them alone to form an accurate conclusion about an organization's culture or its willingness to embrace a mentoring program.

Espoused beliefs. Espoused beliefs are sayings or ideologies that profess organizational values. They carry a deeper meaning than artifacts. For example, many organizations profess a commitment to the development and recognition of their personnel. However, the true measure of these espoused beliefs would be consistent examples of when they have occurred. An employee-of-the-quarter plaque on display that had its last name added four years ago suggests this espoused belief is not really a part of the existing culture.

Underlying assumptions. Underlying assumptions are the most accurate measure of an organization's culture. Espoused beliefs become cultural assumptions when they enjoy repeated success. Assumptions are the best way to discern a mentoring program's likelihood of success. For instance, an organization's underlying assumption may be that new programs are suspect and rarely work. This may be based on previous failures where there was little follow-through or little perceived value or relevancy, or where the cost and effort exceeded the organization's level of tolerance and commitment.

Defining the Need for a Mentoring Culture

Once an understanding of the organization's artifacts, beliefs, and assumptions is articulated, it is important to determine whether the organization is a process- or results-driven culture. Utilizing fact-based data and global trends and strategically wielding them so they overshadow past failures will assist. Following are some

considerations that may prove helpful:

Educational considerations. College education is something that has become increasingly valuable in law enforcement. Several agencies pay incentives to those with college degrees or reimburse educational endeavors. Minimum educational requirements are now commonplace for promotions. An entire generation of seasoned officers, supervisors, and command staff is retiring at an accelerated rate. This is creating a void of experienced leadership. This also means that younger officers stepping in to fill these vacancies will most likely occupy formal leadership positions for many years. This will be problematic as it relates to the growth needs of police personnel.

The organization and community will certainly benefit from an educated workforce. However, college-educated and career-minded personnel might become frustrated as promotion opportunities evaporate. Attrition resulting in the loss of high-quality personnel as they seek better career opportunities may become a significant problem. Because of this potential phenomenon, there has never been a better time than now to invest in the mentoring of an increasingly educated and motivated workforce.

Global and generational trends. Here are some cold, hard facts. Half of the baby boomers will be eligible to retire within the next decade.⁷ This will produce the largest workplace shortage in U.S. history. The 70 million-strong millennial generation, whose members were born between 1977 and 1994, will take the place of the boomers.⁸ Millennials will have a profound impact on the workplace. Organizational leaders must understand and be prepared to deal with the challenges they present. A study on generational experiences revealed a distinct shift away from organizational loyalty.⁹ Many consider the best way to win millennials' loyalty is by investing in them. A recent study of 10,000 employees from a variety of industries identified key drivers of employee retention. Four out of the five key drivers emphasized a desire for positive human relationships.

Key Drivers of Employee Retention

1. Exciting work and challenge
2. Career growth, learning, and development
3. Working with great people and relationships
4. Fair pay
5. Supportive management/great boss¹⁰

Finally, the Pew Research Center found millennials are twice as likely as baby boomers to name as their hero someone close to them, such as a family member, teacher, or mentor.¹¹

All three studies provide tremendous insight into the value of relationship-based leadership and mentoring. The millennials entering today's workforce will thrive under an environment of personal investment.

Economic considerations. Just a few years ago, the policing job market in California, just like many other places in the United States, was flourishing. The housing crash of 2008 and its subsequent recession changed everything. Police budgets have been slashed, and hiring has nearly come to a standstill. What was once considered a recession-proof industry is now seeing the advent of police layoffs and furloughs. This situation is not unique to California and is being reported throughout the United States.

Economic times are tough, but this will one day improve. It is critical then that leaders avoid a cavalier mind-set toward current employees. Where will these agencies be when they come to realize their lack of nurturing and human investment created a mass exodus of quality personnel when the economy improves? The cost of replacing employees is somewhere near two-and-a-half times their annual salaries.¹² This does not even consider the immeasurable costs of losing talented and experienced personnel.

Mentoring carries with it the transformational ability to inspire others to see far beyond their current state. It can help the employee view the part they play as one that is organizationally significant. It is up to leaders to create this environment and consistently remind employees of this fact. A socially innovative mentoring program is an effective and inexpensive way in which this can be accomplished.

Mentoring Success

Successful mentoring programs should be made available to all newly hired sworn and civilian personnel. Protégés should be assigned mentors within the first week of being hired. Mentors should welcome, guide, and encourage protégés throughout their academy, field training, and probationary experiences.

From the beginning, mentoring programs should have a policy in place and be structured with a division of responsibilities and expectations. All mentors should be carefully selected and trained in the mentoring philosophy by an industry expert. The overall success and failure of any mentoring program is dependent on the quality and commitment level of the mentors themselves.

Mentoring Challenges

Many mentors struggle in an area that John C. Maxwell calls “discerning people’s success seeds.”¹³ This is simply taking the time to identify and then nurture what will help protégés reach their full potential. Because of this, innovative methods must be identified to keep mentors motivated and committed to the development of their protégés. Meaningful training can help. Some training ideas include group dynamics, team building, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, strategic communication, and ethics.

Employees who have excelled in the mentoring philosophy must also be organizationally praised and recognized. This will reinforce the value of their contributions and encourage others to perform in the same manner.

Another challenging aspect is effectively mentoring the mentors. As mentoring programs grow in members, it makes it nearly impossible for one coordinator to develop each mentor. The strongest mentors need to be identified and encouraged to take a leadership role in developing their peers.

Overcoming a departmental culture that embraces a process-driven or scientific approach to leadership can also be an obstacle. If the power base of the organization holds these assumptions, then building and maintaining a subculture of human investment and social innovation becomes challenging, if not impossible.

Finally, the greatest weakness of any mentoring program is when it is made available only to new employees. Growth and mentoring opportunities must be made available to new and veteran employees alike throughout every level of the organization. To achieve its maximum impact, mentoring must resonate throughout the entire agency. One of the primary goals of any meaningful mentoring program should be transforming the program into a shared cultural assumption.

The Reward

Many, if not most, organizations struggle to achieve an environment that effectively taps into the full potential of its people. However, people want to work in an organization where all employees, regardless of position, feel as though they occupy the most important position in the organization. In this sort of workplace, service and productivity reach new heights, and relationships between supervisors and subordinates are cherished covenants, not contractual obligations. Such a workplace becomes a place where people work because the job is meaningful to them, and they take ownership and pride in what they set out to accomplish.

Organizational greatness can be realized if employees are valued and allowed to

participate in achieving a shared vision. Leadership and mentoring is a symbiotic relationship that must be shared and nurtured. When it is, mentoring creates an enduring and cyclical culture of leadership at every level of the organization. ■

INSTITUTIONALIZING MENTORING: A STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

1. Teach mentoring skills to all employees (sworn and civilian).
2. Demonstrate and support total agency mentoring.
3. Establish a formal new-hire mentoring process.
4. Appoint a mentor coordinator.
5. Identify an employee work group.
6. Draft mentoring policies and procedures.
7. Define mentor-protégé roles and responsibilities.
8. Select and train mentors.
9. Pair mentors and new hires.
10. Evaluate and fine-tune the process.
11. Create a career development mentoring system.
12. Identify a command coordinator.
13. Identify a supervisory work group.
14. Draft career-planning and goal-setting policies and procedures.
15. Define mentor-protégé roles and responsibilities.
16. Select and train mentors and protégés.

17. Pair mentors and protégés.
18. Evaluate and fine-tune process.
19. Initiate succession planning.
20. Facilitate chief in mentoring commanders.
21. Aid commanders in mentoring supervisors.
22. Assist supervisors in mentoring front-line employees.
23. Allow officers and civilian employees to mentor colleagues and new hires.
24. Position the chief to groom and prepare the successor.

Source: Harvey Sprafka and April H. Kranda, *Best Practices Guide: Institutionalizing Mentoring into Police Departments* (Alexandria, Virginia: Smaller Police Departments Technical Assistance Program, International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2004), 3.

Notes:

¹Harvey Sprafka and April H. Kranda, *Best Practices Guide: Institutionalizing Mentoring into Police Departments* (Alexandria, Virginia: Smaller Police Departments Technical Assistance Program, International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2004), 3.

²Ibid.

³Max DePree, *Leadership Is an Art* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1987), 81–92.

⁴Rebecca Garau and Lyndon Rego, *Stepping into the Void* (Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Crisis Leadership, 2007), 33.

⁵Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc, 2003), 13.

⁶Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 17.

⁷Sharon Jordan-Evans and Beverly Kaye, "Boomer Bailout," *Leadership Excellence* 23, no. 10 (2006): 10-11.

⁸NAS Recruitment, *Generation Y: The Millennials, Ready or Not, Here They Come*.

⁹Karen Wey Smola and Charlotte D. Sutton, "Generational Differences: Revisiting Generational Work Values for the New Millennium," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 23, no. 4 (2002): 363-382.

¹⁰Ellen A. Ensher and Susan E. Murphy, *Power Mentoring: How Successful Mentors and Protégés Get the Most out of Their Relationships* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 15.

¹¹Pew Research Center, *How Young People View Their Lives, Futures and Politics: A Portrait of "Generation Next,"* 2007.

¹²Sharon Jordan-Evans and Beverly Kaye, *Retaining Employees*, 2003.

¹³John C. Maxwell, *Mentoring 101* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008).

IACP Programs

New Police Chief Mentoring Project

The New Police Chief Mentoring Project, a component of the Smaller Law Enforcement Agency Technical Assistance Program, is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance. The program formally matches newly appointed police chiefs with experienced chiefs for a period of three to six months. Mentors provide new chiefs with support and guidance and share information, such as problem-solving strategies, that can assist new chiefs in their role as law enforcement executives. There is no cost associated with participation in the New Chief Mentoring Project, and IACP membership is not required. New chiefs and mentors are eligible for participation if they serve populations of fewer than 50,000; new chiefs must be in their first one to three years as a new chief and mentors must have served as the chief of a smaller agency for at least five years. All participants receive a complimentary copy of the Police Chiefs Desk Reference, 2nd edition, in addition to other written resources. The guide features useful information on topics

such as leadership, management, funding, and grant writing and includes a list of common mistakes that new chiefs often make. For more information, please visit www.iacpmentoring.org or contact Dianne Beer-Maxwell, Program Manager, at 1-800-THE-IACP, extension 844, or maxwell@theiacp.org.

Leading by Legacy: Training for Rural Law Enforcement

The IACP, with support from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act through the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, recently launched the Leading by Legacy Program: Leadership and Management Training for First Line Supervisors, Command Staff, and Executives from Rural Law Enforcement Agencies. The program will provide training and technical assistance to increase stability in the leadership structure of rural police, sheriffs, and tribal departments and build capacity through linkages with regional, state, and federal resources. Through two-and-a-half days of interactive training events, participants will learn how to foster ethical leadership, plan for the future of their departments, and translate leadership to a successful legacy in their communities. Training events are scheduled to begin in July 2010, and a limited number of full travel scholarships are available. Additional resources currently in development include webinars, CD-ROM-based training, and on-site technical assistance. For more information, please visit <http://www.theiacp.org/LeadingbyLegacy> or contact Ben Ekelund, Training Coordinator, at 1-800-THE-IACP, extension 838, or ekelund@theiacp.org.

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