

MENTORING: LEAVING A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

Article

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In a sampling of 24 law enforcement agencies from up and down the state of California, each agency representative indicated that many retirements from the command staff level are anticipated over the next few years. The problem is quite immediate in the case of the San Bernardino Police Department, where 50 retirements are forecasted by the end of 2005.

Many agencies in the state of California currently face significant budget concerns. Cities may rethink their ability to cover the soaring costs of the providing safety employees with the retirement benefit known as 3% @ age 50. The city of San Bernardino has entered into a contract with management and the rank and file to fund a pension enhancement through the Public Administration Retirement System (PARS). The contract was signed in late 2002 and took effect January 1, 2003. This enhancement makes up the difference between what an employee would be paid under the 3% @ age 55 Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) formula, and the 3% @ age 50 formula.

Formal mentoring may hold the key to establishing a means of perpetuating the conveyance of knowledge from one generation of law enforcement managers to the next. Not only will the new leaders benefit from mentoring relationships, but those who serve as mentors will reap benefits as well. "People entering into a mentoring relationship, as either a mentor or mentee, have an expectation that the relationship will be of some benefit to them."<sup>1</sup> Those being mentored can expect to acquire skills and knowledge that would normally take many years of work. The network of contacts available to a mentee will be of benefit in problem solving and gathering new ideas about leadership. Mentors will enjoy the feeling of enhanced self-esteem and of leaving a legacy to future generations of citizens and members of the department.

The high numbers of anticipated retirements over the next five years heighten the need to explore a way to preserve the knowledge and wisdom that will otherwise be lost. In Chip R. Bell's Managers as Mentors: Building Partnership for Learning, he refers to the need to create a "learning organization."<sup>2</sup> This is a term that Bell credits to Peter Senge, author of The Fifth Discipline. Both writers are promoting the need for organizations to build a culture where learning, improvement and constant experimentation are at the core of the enterprise. These examples are cited from private business, and may have far-reaching implications for establishing the framework of lifelong learning through mentoring in the law enforcement profession as well.

In The Minding Organization, Dr. Moshe F. Rubinstein warns that too much analysis of an industry may blind one "to a future laden with low-probability, but high-impact, developments that will occur outside the industry."<sup>3</sup> The future of California law enforcement is facing a high-probability and high-impact cycle of retirements that will all but drain management ranks of desperately needed experience. Dr. Rubinstein writes of making a "half-plan," advocating that organizations "must be ready to respond to 50% of the future that cannot be anticipated."<sup>4</sup>

#### Mentoring: An Historical Perspective

The story of Mentor comes from mythology and Homer's Odyssey, and has been loosely paraphrased from Mentoring by Gordon F. Shea. When Odysseus, king of Ithaca, leaves to fight the Trojan War, he entrusts the care of his household to Mentor, who serves as both teacher and overseer of Odysseus' son, Telemachus. After the war, Odysseus is condemned to wander vainly for ten years in his attempt to return home. In time, Telemachus, who by now is grown, goes in search of his father. Athena, Goddess

of War and patroness of the arts and industry, assumes the form of Mentor and accompanies Telemachus on his quest. Eventually, father and son are reunited and together they strike down those who would try to take control of Odysseus' throne, which is the birthright of Telemachus.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, the word mentor has become synonymous with the roles of trusted advisor, friend, teacher, and those who seem to have a special wisdom. Included among some of the more historically recognizable mentoring relationships are Socrates and Plato and Hyden and Beethoven.

### Mentoring for the Future

In researching formal mentoring as a future issue, an informal survey of twenty-four law enforcement colleagues revealed that only one of these agencies represented was engaged in some type of mentoring. It seems that formal mentoring is virtually non-existent in the law enforcement profession. Given this finding, and the anticipated exodus of many law enforcement managers and administrators, the introduction of a formal mentoring proposal is timely.

Constant and rapid change coupled with decreasing funding and increased loss of experienced management would seem to make a compelling case for formal mentoring. Lack of attention to the development of competent managers will spell trouble for communities that rely on law enforcement leadership.

A formal mentoring program would have the following elements:

- Pairing of qualified mentors with aspiring mentees, beginning at the level of detective
- Serve all persons interested in being mentored

- Seek outcomes from the mentoring relationship that are linked to organizational goals
- Create a broad network of learning and support resources for the mentee
- Focus on internal development of management candidates to meet organizational needs
- Provide career development opportunities for mentees
- Consideration for generational differences

In The Mentor's Guide, Lois J. Zachary likens the process of mentoring to cultivating a garden. Zachary spends time emphasizing the importance of “tending” to the people to be mentored to achieve the highest results.<sup>6</sup> A critical component of tending that garden of people then becomes identifying the learning goals desired and facilitating the relationships most likely to yield the optimum learning environment. Zachary suggests that when learning is not properly tended to, the mentoring process is seriously compromised and becomes little more than a transaction. The mentoring relationship must be one in which both mentor and mentee feel comfortable to express themselves freely. The greatest learning may occur during simple conversations where a free exchange of ideas takes place.

Adult learning is a very different dynamic. The learning that takes place in a mentoring relationship is the fruit of something Zachary refers to as a “learning partnership.”<sup>7</sup> The mentee will play a much more active role in the learning process than that seen in a traditional teacher/student paradigm. The candidate learns key skills through the exchange of ideas which can only occur in a relationship where both mentor and mentee are working in collaboration to achieve the mentee’s learning goals. The

mentee takes on increased responsibility for creating a learning environment. In addition, the mentee is encouraged to take a lead role in establishing learning priorities and identifying and accessing resources that aid the learning process.

Several elements related to adult learning have been referenced by Zachary from a work by Malcolm Knowles (1980) as the elements relate to mentoring. Chief among these adult learning points is the need to “establish a climate conducive to learning” and the need to “involve learners in planning how and what they will learn.”<sup>8</sup>

- Adults learn best when they are involved in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning.
- The role of the facilitator is to create and maintain a supportive climate that promotes the conditions necessary for learning to take place.
- Adult learners have a need to be self-directing.
- Readiness for learning increases when there is a specific need to know.
- Life’s reservoir of experience is a primary learning resource; the life experiences of others enrich the learning process.
- Adult learners have an inherent need for immediacy of application.
- Adults respond best to learning when they are internally motivated to learn.<sup>9</sup>

Management candidates will learn through experience as well as relationships.

Law enforcement agencies would do well to facilitate a process that affords management candidates the opportunity to experience the aspects of management thought to be most critical to success.

Certainly, the development of all employees should be a goal of any organization interested in creating a sound legacy of leadership for the future. There is a significant

transition that occurs when officers and detectives promote to a position of supervision. Suddenly, new supervisors find that organizational exposure to liability, as well as personal liability, are concepts that can be impacted by every decision they make. Continual evaluation of social, technological, environmental, economical, and political trends and events will be a component of the future management skill set. A formal mentoring program may be a way to ensure that a solid legacy of leadership is achieved.

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was used to assist in futures forecasting so that trends having some relevance to mentoring in law enforcement could be identified. The NGT panel then identified events that may or may not have impact on the trends. The identified events were things that may or may not occur. Cross-impact analysis was conducted pitting the events against the trends to determine a forecasted impact. Through this process it became clear that one or two of the events would have positive impact on the issue of formal mentoring. One was a bit of a surprise. The data suggested that should PERS reduce public safety pensions, this may cause some experienced managers to stay in the profession a little longer. This event would create a potential pool of mentor candidates that might otherwise have less experience. While the other events seemed to signal financial difficulty for the organization, the gloomy outlook they portend might actually be an indicator that mentoring might ease the forecasted impact.

#### Leadership Implications

The role of leadership in law enforcement agency would be to take the steps necessary to evaluate the feasibility of advancing formal mentoring programs. As leaders in the organization there is a constant duty to train and prepare those in their charge for the next level of responsibility. Formal mentoring would seem to be the right element at

this time in the organization to ensure that many years of experience are not lost when senior members of the organization retire. Taking an active role in conducting a strategic plan and then leading implementation will not only serve to accomplish the goal of establishing mentoring as a part of the law enforcement culture, but it will also serve as a training platform. Strategic planning and transition management are critical skills of competent management. A formal mentoring program would play a vital role in ensuring that future managers have these skills to cope with a constantly changing world.

### Conclusions

The suggested course for law enforcement leadership seems clear. Formal mentoring programs can enhance the development of law enforcement managers.

Management development is a critical component of sustaining quality in an organization whether in law enforcement or business. Companies in the private sector are run on a “bottom line” basis where profit is the goal. In law enforcement, the bottom line is measured in community satisfaction with service delivery. Crime statistics will also play a significant role, but most citizens understand that not all crime can be eliminated. The community is looking for quality law enforcement leaders to help solve crime problems and deal with quality of life issues.

Formal mentoring provides law enforcement leadership with an opportunity to strengthen the organization through a process of employee development that ensures organizational goals and objectives are emphasized. Through mentoring relationships, mentees are exposed to the nuances of managing a law enforcement agency in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By developing a formal mentoring program that serves all those who are interested in developing their management skills, the organization achieves greater

strength and continuity in leadership. The structure of a formal mentoring program will be most effective when linked to organizational goals. New managers will benefit from exposure to a broad network of resources both internal to the organization and in the community at large.

There are many benefits to formal mentoring, many of which will become more evident to those law enforcement leaders who take the steps to institute such a program. Assessing the current state of management experience in the organization will be essential, followed by the creation of a committed steering committee to see the project through. Not all programs will fit all organizations. The development of a custom curriculum, crafted by members of each agency will most likely be most powerful since the people in the organization will see their own fingerprints on the project.

Formal mentoring will anchor the process of continual learning within the culture of the organization, ensuring competent leadership in law enforcement for the foreseeable future. The future is ours to define.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Kathy Lacey, *Making Mentoring Happen: A simple and effective guide to implementing a successful mentoring program* (Business & Professional Publishing Pty Limited, 1999), 13.
- <sup>2</sup> Chip R. Bell, *Managers as Mentors: Building Partnerships for Learning* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1996), from Prologue, xi-xii.
- <sup>3</sup> Moshe F. Rubinstein & Iris R. Firstenberg, *The Minding Organization* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Publishers, 1999), 47.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 48.
- <sup>5</sup> Gordon F. Shea, *Mentoring* (Crisp Publications, Inc., 1992), 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Lois J. Zachary, *The Mentor's Guide; Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Publishers, 2000)
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 21.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 4.

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