

# Best Practices Guide



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## Institutionalizing Mentoring Into Police Departments

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# Best Practices Guide for Institutionalizing Mentoring Into Police Departments

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*One of the strategies often cited as an excellent means of enhancing law enforcement recruitment and retention efforts is the practice of employee mentoring. This document provides chiefs from smaller police departments with a step-by-step method for institutionalizing mentoring within their agency. It is the authors' belief that mentoring is an essential function in development of the next generation of police leaders.*

## What is Mentoring?

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 (protégé).

Mentoring is not a new concept or practice. History abounds with examples of professional mentoring. **Mentor** was the name of the man charged with providing wisdom, advice and guidance to King Odysseus' son in Homer's, The Odyssey. During the Middle Ages, boys served as apprentices to masters in a craft or trade while gaining skills to eventually qualify as a journeyman, and finally, as a master. During this time, the mentoring relationship ensured the continuity and quality of the craft being handed down to the next generation.

The modern concept of mentoring, that has recently been used to effectively recruit and retain new employees in business and academic institutions, provides law enforcement with an opportunity to engage and anchor new employees at a time when industry competition for those employees is at an all time high.

### Mentoring Relationship Goals:

- 1) To promote professional growth
- 2) Inspire personal motivation
- 3) Enhance effectiveness of police service

## Mentoring Benefits for Mentors

- Mentors are personally rewarded for spotlighting and developing talent.
- Mentors must be knowledgeable of department policies, procedures, and contemporary policing practices.
- Mentors pave the way for others, thereby leaving their legacy 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 “get by giving.”

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

## Mentoring Benefits for Protégés

- Increases likelihood for success. Mentors help protégés gain competency and avoid failure.
- Assists protégés in setting goals and charting career paths.
- Encourages and provides opportunities for new experiences and professional growth.
- Helps the protégé avoid pitfalls and learn through real-life examples.
- Enhances the protégés’ feeling of worth to the mentor and the organization.
- Encourages self-confidence by cheering protégé achievements.

Many successful people attribute their achievements to a mentoring relationship. Many “repay” their debt to the mentor and the organization by becoming future mentors. When mentoring begins with new employees, it is the first step toward institutionalizing mentoring in the department.

## Formal Versus Informal Mentoring

Some police organizations have implemented new-hire mentoring programs as a method of reducing employee turnover, while others have chosen the more frequent method of informal mentoring. Examples of informal mentoring have occurred throughout the history of policing. Typically, a veteran officer encourages friends or acquaintances to apply for positions in their department. As a result, there is a natural tendency for the veteran officer to encourage, support and give information to his or her friend during the hiring and training period. This informal mentoring relationship provides an advantage to the new employee by helping them to feel connected to the new department.

### **The Benefits of Formal Mentoring:**

- 1) Ensures that all employees will receive the benefits of a mentoring relationship
- 2) Promotes agency loyalty and inclusiveness
- 3) Identifies program goals
- 4) Creates program structure and procedures
- 5) Defines mentor/protégé roles and responsibilities

The best reason for creating a formal process is that it affords every employee the opportunity and benefit of mentoring and promotes loyalty and inclusiveness within the organization. In addition, a formal mentoring process identifies goals, creates structure and procedures, and defines mentor/protégé roles and responsibilities. Although the program requires time to plan and initiate and requires some oversight, it often results in enhanced employee self-esteem and a “great place to work” environment. Whether launching a formal mentoring program or creating a mentoring environment in an organization, mentoring can improve and promote any leadership initiative.

Law enforcement as an industry has experienced many challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel; this is due in part to national and local economic change and a transformation of effective recruiting methods influenced by modern media. For law enforcement agencies interested in improving effective recruitment, retention, and personnel leadership development by initiating a mentoring program, a step-by-step mentoring plan follows.

### **Institutionalizing Mentoring: A Step-by-Step Plan**

1. Teach mentoring skills to all employees (sworn and civilian)
2. Demonstrate and support total agency mentoring at the chief level
3. Establish formal new hire mentoring process
  - a. Appoint mentor coordinator
  - b. Identify employee workgroup
  - c. Draft mentoring policies and procedures
  - d. Define mentor/protégé roles and responsibilities
  - e. Select and train mentors
  - f. Pair mentors and new hires
  - g. Evaluate and fine tune process
4. Create career development mentoring system
  - a. Identify command coordinator
  - b. Identify supervisory workgroup
  - c. Draft career planning/goal setting policies and procedures
  - d. Define mentor/protégé roles and responsibilities
  - e. Select and train mentors and protégés.
  - f. Pair mentors and protégés
  - g. Evaluate and fine tune process
5. Promote succession planning
  - a. Chief mentors commanders
  - b. Commanders mentor supervisors
  - c. Supervisors mentor line employees
  - d. Officers/civilian employees mentor colleagues and new hires.

## **What Mentors and Protégés Do**

Before defining the roles and responsibilities of the mentor, the goals of the mentoring process should be understood by the mentor and protégé. For example, consider a new hire mentoring process. Is the goal to, 1) provide a welcoming atmosphere that will anchor the new employee to the organization, 2) provide a career development mentoring process to help employees identify and map out career targets, 3) begin a mentoring program that ensures the continuity and quality of the next generation of police leaders, or all three? Once mentoring program goals are identified, the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and protégé must be established in order to avoid confusion and potential conflict and to maximize program success.

### **Mentor Responsibilities:**

- ◆ 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.

The mentoring relationship requires commitment and shared responsibility for the protégé also. The partners should discuss mutual roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the relationship and review them periodically as necessary.

### **Protégé Responsibilities**

- ◆ 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.

## **The Chief as Mentor: The Knoxville, Iowa Model**

Successful leaders are often successful mentors. In most large agencies, line employees seldom have direct interaction with their chief, but in smaller agencies, employees interact with their chief on a daily basis. As a result, chiefs of smaller agencies can enhance their leadership effectiveness by demonstrating mentoring and by encouraging a total agency mentoring environment. As the lead agency mentor, the chief can model employee value to the agency by supporting employee career planning, by providing opportunities for training, and by encouraging learning and skill building. Chief Harvey Sprafka, now retired, led an agency of eighteen sworn officers in Knoxville, Iowa, modeled the concept of the chief as a mentor.

### **A Goal Setting and Career Planning Approach**

Goal setting and career planning sessions with the chief at Knoxville Police Department were usually conducted once a year with each sworn and civilian employee. These sessions were intended to promote employee growth and skill development.

The chief saw reduced employee turnover and increased employee loyalty after instituting the practice. These sessions occurred with greater frequency for some employees when goals were achieved quickly or with less frequency for employees who had not met short-term objectives. Because employee goals and interests continually evolve, the periodic review and monitoring of the employee's progress was vitally important to maintaining this program.

These goal setting and career development meetings with department employees were flexible in structure and tailored to meet the age, personality, and work/life experiences of each employee. By making the individual sessions informal and relaxed, the process was an insightful and rewarding experience for the employee and the chief. ***The skill of active listening is an essential component of the success of the mentoring process!***

The Knoxville Police Department employee goal setting and career planning process required two meetings. The first meeting was preparatory. Here the chief explained the initial phase of the process, during which the employee identified and clarified his or her current and future career goals. The employee was encouraged to consider the present and future in terms of short, intermediate, and long-term goals. Their goals were to be achievable, but challenging. If the goals could be achieved with little effort, they were seldom long lasting or fulfilling.

Next, the employee was asked to conduct a self-assessment in which he or she identifies personal strengths and weaknesses. This assessment provided both the employee and the chief with additional insight into the employee's disposition and temperament. The employee was required to succinctly document their goals on one type-written page.

During this stage, the chief offered to include a spouse or significant other in the goal-setting and personal examination process if the employee preferred to have them included. This was an example of the "family-centered" policy of the Knoxville Police Department.

A week later a second meeting was conducted during which the employee's one page goal statement was reviewed and discussed. After reviewing the goal statement, the chief prepared questions and feedback for clarification then offered his recommendations for achieving the goals. The chief and employee mutually decided upon a timeline for review and accomplishment of the goals.

A copy of the goals were retained so that it could be referred to when planning and scheduling training opportunities or specialized assignments for the employee. As agency leader, Chief Sprafka believed he was responsible not only to influence and direct, but also to create an environment for positive growth by

providing resources, job-related opportunities, and experiences that would improve employee personal and professional skills. As their mentor, the chief strived to meet employee training and assignment “wants;” however, greater emphasis is placed on meeting individual training and assignment “needs.” The chief and employee determined the training and assignment need based upon the personal assessment completed with the chief, employee work experience, previous assignment evaluations, education completed, and the employee goal plan.

The chief provided private sector customer service and communication skill training as ways to augment agency educational opportunities beyond the traditional police training topics. Local banks and other businesses provided contemporary service-based training for the agency’s sworn and civilian employees. Private sector customer service and communications training provided police employees with the opportunity to interact with citizens and members of the business community. This cross training built agency and community cooperation and supported broad-based perspectives of work, service, and community.

The model of employee goal-setting and career planning in Knoxville required time and commitment to agency growth and improvement by both the chief and employees. The program worked to the advantage of the Knoxville Police Department and community. The commitment of time and attention to his employees paid off for Chief Sprafka through successful labor negotiations, sustained employee loyalty, and low turnover rates.

This model can be particularly beneficial to recruiting and retaining new employees who are focused on work and family relationships as well as the development of job skills. While the smaller agency chief may have the advantage of knowing and working closely with employees, it is the author’s belief that elements of this program and the chief/mentor model can be successfully implemented in agencies of any size.

## **Frequently asked questions:**

### **1. What is the difference between a mentor and an FTO for new employees?**

The role of the mentor and the field training officer (FTO) are distinct, yet complement each other. The role of the FTO is to train and develop effective police officers. As required during field training, the FTO evaluates the recruit’s performance on a daily basis.

The mentor’s role is supportive and relational. Mentoring is *not* performance evaluation. The mentor is responsible for contacting the new employee before the agency appointment date and assisting with an effective transition into the police organization by answering questions and serving as a resource for information. The mentor maintains contact with the recruit during academy training to provide support, guidance, and encouragement. Unlike the FTO, the mentor does not evaluate recruit performance.

### **2. How do you prevent conflict between the FTO and mentor?**

The first step in avoiding conflict between the FTO and mentor is for the chief to demonstrate support of the mentoring process. Second, include some field training officers in the development of the mentor program so that their input is included. The last critical step is to train mentors and field training officers so that they understand the differences in their roles. Periodic review and oversight by a mentor coordinator will help diminish the potential for conflict.

### **3. Is the mentoring process lengthy and a drain on staffing requirements?**

The time devoted to the mentoring relationship is based on the needs of the protégé. For example, a new employee who is an area native will have fewer needs than an employee who is hired from outside the area. More time is needed to transition a new hire into the police department and the community. It is important to be flexible and support the mentor to provide this important assistance to a new employee. The benefits in terms of employee retention, enhanced morale, and department loyalty far outweigh the marginal

commitment of staff time. The mentoring function can be accomplished while the mentor is on duty in conjunction with fulfilling primary duties.

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### **About the Authors**

**Chief Harvey Sprafka (Ret.)** is a 30-year law enforcement veteran. He began his career in 1975 in Knoxville, Iowa. During his career, he spent 16 years as a school resource officer and served in patrol and supervisory positions. In 1995 he was appointed chief of the Knoxville Police Department and served until his retirement in January of 2005. Following his time as chief, he served as the Mayor of the City of Knoxville, Iowa. Chief Sprafka has a bachelor's degree in English and History from Moorhead State College in Minnesota and graduated from the Brown Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, School of Radio-Television Broadcasting. Chief Sprafka was news and program director for KNIA/KRLS radio in Knoxville prior to becoming a police officer. He served a number of positions in the Iowa Professional Executive Forum and has served as a project advisor for the IACP Smaller Police Department Technical Assistance Program since 2001.

**Lieutenant April Kranda (Ret.)** is a 20 year veteran of the Fairfax County Police Department. Ms. Kranda served in a variety of operational and administrative positions, including patrol, criminal investigations, internal affairs, and media relations. As Aide to the Deputy Chief for Operations, Ms. Kranda developed and implemented the New Hire Mentoring Program for her department. She also served as a mentoring advisor for several law enforcement agencies and training facilities.