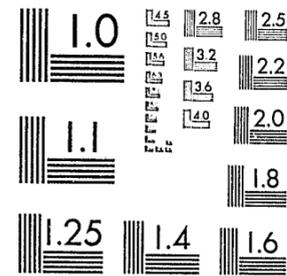


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ACQUISITIONS



The Cover: Confrontations with irrational, violent individuals are day-to-day occurrences which threaten the safety of police officers everywhere. (Staged training photo.) See article p. 1.

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William H. Webster, Director

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Training



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Professors of the Street Police Mentors

"Although police cadets train extensively for their occupation, training is not complete until they work the streets under the guidance of a seasoned veteran."

In Greek legend, Mentor was a loyal friend and wise advisor to Odysseus. In modern times, "mentor" has come to mean any wise advisor, especially an older, more experienced one. Although mentoring is an ancient practice, the concept has received a great deal of recent attention from two different circles. In developmental psychology, researchers who have studied the process of adult development have found that mentors facilitate the psychological growth of young adults.¹ In business manage-

ment, researchers and practitioners have noted that beginning managers need mentors to succeed in the business world.²

Mentoring is also important in law enforcement. Although police cadets train extensively for their occupation, training is not complete until they work the streets under the guidance of a seasoned veteran. As one experienced patrolman advised, "... forget everything you learned in the Academy, 'cause the street is where you learn to be a cop."³ Certainly this



Mr. Fagan



Mr. Ayers

advice is overstated, but the point is valid—classroom preparation is not enough. On-the-job experience, guided by a wise mentor complements good training.

Case Study

In *The New Centurions*, Joseph Wambaugh describes a good mentoring relationship.⁴ Gus Plebesly, the young rookie, is paired with Andy Kilvinsky, a 20-year veteran. After meeting each other, they walk toward their patrol car, and Kilvinsky, pointing to the pictures of policemen killed in the line of duty, offers the following advice: "See those pictures, partner? These guys aren't heroes. Those guys just screwed up and now they're dead. Pretty soon you'll get comfortable and relaxed out there, just like the rest of us. But don't get too comfortable. Remember the guys in the picture."⁵

A few hours later Kilvinsky demonstrates the kind of knowledge that cannot be learned from a textbook. While the two officers investigate a forgery, a drunk woman says she was offered \$10 to pass a bad check by a middle-aged black man of average size, wearing a red shirt. Kilvinsky circles the block twice and stops a man wearing a brown shirt who is neither middle-aged nor of average size. Much to the surprise of the rookie, he is their man.

After booking the suspect, Gus asks his partner how he knew, and the veteran gives the following explanation: "I don't honestly know how I knew. But I knew. At least I was pretty sure. The shirt wasn't red, but it wasn't green, either. It was a color

that could be called red by a fuzzy-eyed drunk. It was a rusty brown. And Gandy (the suspect) was standing a little too casually there in the parking lot. He was too cool and he gave me too much of an 'I got nothing to hide' look when I was driving around eyeballing everybody that could possibly be the guy. And when I came back around he had moved to the other side of the lot but when he sees us he stops to show he's not walking away. He's got nothing to hide. I know this means nothing by itself, but these are some of the little things. I just *knew*, I tell you."⁶

Eventually Kilvinsky retires and rarely sees his former partner, but part of Kilvinsky remains with Gus. Wambaugh quotes Gus, now a veteran, explaining police work to his new partner. "You can't exaggerate the closeness of our dealings with people," said Gus. "We see them when nobody else sees them, and when they're being born and dying and fornicating and drunk. Now Gus knew it was Kilvinsky talking and he was using Kilvinsky's very words; it made him feel a little like Kilvinsky was still here when he used the big man's words and that was a good feeling."⁷

Wambaugh described the process of identification, an important part of mentoring. The protégé wants to be like his mentor and will eventually adopt some of his traits.

Research Study

For our study, we constructed a survey that asks subjects about their experiences as a protégé and as a mentor. (See fig. 1.) We sent the survey to about 150 police officers in Kentucky, Texas, and Pennsylvania. About 70 subjects returned usable

Figure 1

Sample Items from the Mentoring Survey

1. How do you feel about your current occupation? (check one)

- A. I am very satisfied with my occupation.
B. Most of the time I like my work, but sometimes I get dissatisfied with my work.
C. Most of the time I am dissatisfied with my work.
D. I am very dissatisfied with my work.
E. Other: (If none of these statements come close to expressing how you feel about your occupation, please tell us in your own words.)

2. Think back to when you were first starting in your current occupation or beginning to train for the job. Which of these statements best describes your mentoring experiences? (check one)

- A. When I first started this occupation, I became friends with a more-experienced person who took me "under his wing" and helped me out.
B. When I first started this occupation, I became friends with several experienced people who helped me out and one of them was especially influential.
C. I became friends with several experienced people who helped me get started, but no one person was especially influential.
D. None of the experienced people took a special interest in me.
E. Other:

3. Did you "pick-up" or learn any of your mentor's characteristics? In other words, did you incorporate any of your mentor's traits into your own personality? (Check any trait(s) that you feel were learned from your mentor or strengthened by his/her example.) Check as many as appropriate.

- A. Honesty
B. Frank and outspoken
C. Disciplined and hard-working
D. Dedication to job
E. Dedication to family
F. Patience
G. Persistence
H. Shrewdness
I. Political sophistication
J. Independence
K. Neatness
L. Tactfulness
M. Other:

surveys. We also administered the survey to 87 nurses and 107 public school teachers to use as a comparison group.

The results of this study indicated that almost all (91 percent) rookie police officers had some mentoring, and about half of these received guidance from several veterans with no one person being especially influential

(diffuse mentoring). Nurses and teachers did not differ from police in this respect. Most police mentors (80 percent) were veteran patrolmen, not high-ranking officers. Nurses, but not teachers, differed in this respect—head nurses had mentored on a regular basis.

Components

The literature suggests there are three components to a strong mentor/protégé relationship: 1) Coaching, 2) identification, and 3) friendship. Our survey included questions related to these components.

As coaches, the veteran police officers helped the rookies in the following ways:

- 1) Most protégé (76 percent) indicated that their mentor helped them gain self-confidence;
2) About 40 percent said that their advisor had listened to their ideas and encouraged their creativity;
3) About two-thirds said their coach helped them learn the technical aspects of police work; and
4) Almost half of the rookies said that their mentor helped them understand the administration of the department and taught them how to "work with people."

To measure the degree of identification, we asked, "In the early stages of your relationship, did you look up to this person and want to be like him (her)? Check one: A. Definitely yes, B. Somewhat, C. No." The majority (78 percent) of those police officers who had a mentor gave an A or B response, and 21 percent of this total identified strongly (A response). Nurses identified more intensely with their mentors than did police officers or teachers.

Responses to the survey indicated that 10 particular traits were strengthened through identification.

"... forget everything you learned in the Academy, 'cause the street is where you learn to be a cop."

Some of those mentioned more frequently were dedication to the job, tactfulness, patience, independence, and honesty.

Thirty-six percent of the officers who had mentors considered them "very good friends," and another 37 percent said they were "rather friendly" with their mentors. Twenty-five percent indicated that they did not have a close personal relationship with their mentor. Although 73 percent of the police officers were friendly with their mentors, only 24 percent saw them socially. This pattern existed also for nurses and teachers.

Correlational Data

Using the Chi Square Test of Association, we correlated having a mentor with job satisfaction, rank, being a mentor, and job burnout. (We had to group the three occupations together for this analysis to eliminate empty cells.) The relationship between having a mentor and job satisfaction was significant, indicating that subjects who had a definite mentor were more satisfied with their work than those who either had no mentoring or diffuse mentoring. The relationship between having a mentor and being a mentor was also significant; those who had a mentor were much more likely later in their career to befriend and guide a novice.

There was no relationship between having a mentor and rank, and the relationship between having a mentor and job burnout was not in the predicted direction—those who had more than one mentor were more likely to burn out than those who had only one mentor or none at all.

The fact that many professionals from diverse settings reported similar mentoring experiences suggests that mentoring is flourishing. Among our sample, veteran police officers helped all but a small number of the newcomers. The remaining officers received either diffuse mentoring or the guidance of a special mentor.

We were concerned that the tough, independent image of the police officer hindered his receiving and giving help. However, in our study, mentoring was as prevalent in the police profession as it was in the two professions noted for their nurturing ability.

The positive relationship between mentoring and job satisfaction suggests the value of this process. The data on identification lends additional support to the value of mentoring. Any relationship that increases dedication, tactfulness, honesty, persistence, and independence should be encouraged.

In spite of these optimistic findings, there is still a need for improvement. For example, our data indicates that fewer supervisors are mentoring young officers (significantly more nursing supervisors are mentoring). Sergeants and lieutenants should take a more personal interest in their patrolmen.

Although more research is needed to clarify this point, we suspect that just "on-the-job mentoring" is not as beneficial as a more complete mentoring experience—one that includes professional, personal, and social influence. Therefore, we encourage a well-rounded mentoring approach that includes more than just professional matters.

Finally, there is that small, but vocal, minority in our police departments who have never had a mentor, do not want one, and do not intend to be one. This attitude was expressed by one of our subjects: "I've never really had a mentor, don't want one. I self-educated myself to this point, with problems, but I feel a more since (sic) of pride and the habits I have are my own and not related to the mentor process." This minority needs further attention.

Although most rookies are guided by mentors, some miss out on this process, and there is a great deal of inconsistency even among the best police mentors. In an effort to correct these two problems, many police departments have developed Field Training Officer (FTO) Programs.

FTO Programs

In a typical FTO program, the graduating cadet leaves the academy to ride with a veteran FTO who volunteers to "break in" the rookies on a regular basis. Most FTO's train for this position and receive incentive pay. The novice officer works with the FTO for a specified time period, usually between 3 to 6 months. The veteran teaches and evaluates his understudy on points of law, driving skill, departmental procedure, etc. At the completion of field experience, the FTO recommends termination from the department, another FTO experience, or advancement to solo officer status.

Although the FTO concept seems like a reasonable way to ensure good mentoring, there is always something lost when an organization formalizes a social experience like the mentor/protégé relationship. In a preliminary study of five FTO Programs—Houston, TX, Jefferson County, KY, Fresno, CA, Fairfax County, VA, and

“Although some have critical police mentoring because it ‘guarantees that the organization will not change over long periods of time,’ we believe that mentoring is the culmination of good training.”

Dade County, FL—three threats to good FTO mentoring were revealed, including too much standardization, too much evaluation, and too much authority.⁸

Consistency

There is a “catch-22” to the FTO concept. Police departments adopt FTO programs for various reasons, but two of the goals are somewhat conflicting. FTO programs are designed to standardize field training and to take advantage of the personal one-to-one relationship between a recruit and his FTO. If a department emphasizes the former, mentoring suffers; if the administration encourages a strong personal relationship and individual tutoring, field training is less consistent.

Some programs expect the FTO to take an individual approach. Although they expect a reasonable amount of consistency in field training, they encourage the FTO to use his unique, personal style and they emphasize the importance of personal discretion and expect the FTO to model sound decisionmaking. Other programs stress the development of skills and the learning of policies and procedures.

Evaluation

FTO programs must find a balance between evaluation and teaching. One of the purposes of the FTO program is to weed out incompetent police officers while they are still on probation. Every police chief knows how difficult it is to prove incompetence and fire the negligent officer. The FTO program provides the evaluation and documentation needed to do this; however, if this aspect of the program is emphasized, mentoring

suffers. An observation made in the Fresno study was that “the evaluations and monitoring of the trainees’ performance frequently precedes training. Trainees have stated that often when they are evaluated, they are not given the training needed to rectify errors. They perceive this activity as defeating the purpose of the Field Training Programs.”⁹

If the FTO is perceived as a critical evaluator who can terminate a career before it really begins, the atmosphere is too tense for teaching or good mentoring. In a good mentoring relationship, the protege feels comfortable enough to ask questions.

The five FTO programs analyzed required at least weekly evaluations; all of the evaluations were thorough, covering driving skills, report writing, rapport with citizens, etc. The Jefferson County Department provides a 1-week “limbo period” with no written evaluation, with formal written evaluations beginning in the second week.

The Houston Police Department has modified their procedure to correct the evaluation problem. Initially, the Houston FTO’s trained and evaluated their rookies for a 3-month period before recommending retraining, advancement, or termination. Most of the FTO’s found the role of teaching incompatible with the role of evaluation, so the department trained a group of FTO’s especially for evaluation. After 3 months of FTO teaching, the rookie rides with a new FTO who evaluates the trainee’s performance for 2 weeks and then recommends retraining, advancement, or termination. This procedure enables the original FTO to work with the trainee in a more relaxed environ-

ment—one that is more conducive to mentoring.

Authority

The best mentor is between a parent figure and a peer—perhaps like a “big brother” or “big sister.”¹⁰ If the mentor is too much like a parent, the young adult does not have the freedom to grow.¹¹ By surveying police officers, nurses, and teachers, we found that senior colleagues served as mentors much more frequently than supervisors.¹²

Theoretically, this philosophy seems consistent with the FTO program where rookies are assigned to fellow patrol officers. But in practice, some FTO’s wield too much authority over their understudy. This is partly due to over-emphasis on evaluation and screening and partly due to the personality characteristics of some FTO’s. In any case, the result is poor mentoring.

The “inferior/superior syndrome” was seen as a serious problem in the evaluation of the Fresno FTO program. Although most FTO’s were reasonable in their use of authority, some were not. Graduates of the FTO program have indicated the following:

- 1) “The field training officer/trainee relationship does not allow for much freedom of intercourse as the trainee is always subservient to the FTO who may or may not be on a power trip. . . .”
- 2) “Some (FTO’s) were overbearing with God-like attitudes.”
- 3) “FTO is very knowledgeable, however is very reluctant to help his ‘inferior’ trainee. I felt that his whole thing was to keep this trainee in constant turmoil, possibly to see if you could cut it.”¹³

In summary, there are three major threats to the mentoring potential of the FTO program: An overemphasis on standardization, too much evaluation, and authoritarian FTO’s.

Conclusion

Although some have criticized police mentoring because it “guarantees that the organization will not change over long periods of time,”¹⁴ we believe that mentoring is the culmination of good training. Police departments should encourage good mentoring by either facilitating informal mentoring or by developing sound FTO programs.

Some researchers and practitioners believe that mentoring cannot be forced or contrived. Therefore, some departments may choose to promote mentoring but not through an FTO program. Police administrators can improve informal mentoring in several ways, including:

- 1) Teach novice and veteran officers the importance of good mentoring. Provide them with good examples like Wambaugh’s Kilvinsky.
- 2) Reinforce veterans who show a sincere interest in helping beginners. Praise, extra training, time off, and pay raises might be effective reinforcers.
- 3) Arrange the working environment so that it is conducive to veteran and rookie officers becoming friends. Promote after-work social activities, such as a bowling league, fishing trips, etc., where young officers can become friendly with veterans.
- 4) Sergeants and lieutenants should take a more personal interest in their rookies.

Although “chemistry” is important in mentoring, formal mentoring programs have worked well in many organizations, including police departments. Therefore, we recommend experimentation with FTO programs.

FTO programs strive for goals other than good mentoring and administrators must consider these factors. However, the following recommendations deserve serious consideration:

- 1) Do not stress standardization to the point where FTO’s are unable to contribute their unique personality and style to the training of their understudy.
- 2) Do not overemphasize evaluation. Allow the trainees at least a one month “grace period” without a written, formal evaluation, or consider Houston’s procedure—bring in new FTO’s to do the formal evaluation at the end of the training period.
- 3) Do not allow authoritarian overbearing police officers to become FTO’s.
- 4) Develop a battery of instruments to measure Erickson’s¹⁵ trait of generativity (a concern for the younger generation), and use this personality variable—along with other factors—to select FTO’s.
- 5) Try to match FTO’s with similar trainees. Experiment with an adjective checklist or an activities checklist. Pair a trainee with an FTO who responds in a similar manner on the checklist.

- 6) Trainees who represent a minority need *two* strong FTO’s. For example, a female cadet should be assigned to a female FTO who can sympathize with her particular situation and to an understanding male FTO who can inform the rest of “the boys” that she is “ok.”
- 7) Arrange and encourage outside social activities for FTO’s to relate in an informal way with their trainees.

Something is always lost when one formalizes and structures a social phenomenon, like mentoring, but the loss need not be fatal. Sensitive administrators can operate FTO programs that capture many of the benefits of good mentoring.

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Footnotes

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END