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Mentoring

Effective mentors pass on their values & principles

The quality of a police officer's career is largely determined by the mentoring the officer receives (or fails to receive). Mentoring is now recognized as an essential component to new-member development in any profession, especially law enforcement. Traditional training with groups of inductees remains necessary and effective. However, mentoring brings training to the next level. Successful mentoring powerfully transfers values and principles, and develops character.

I was fortunate to learn from several influential mentors. Early in my career, a street-savvy veteran police officer, Nick Najera, chose me as his challenge. He was eight years my senior, a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge and a Silver Star recipient. He not only gave me strategic, tactical and technical insight, but also infected me with his passion and enthusiasm for police work. He made the job fun and fulfilling. In fact, he got me so

committed to our role of protecting the community we averaged more than 20 solid "obs" (observation felony arrests) per month, and crime dropped dramatically in our area of responsibility. Najera believed in me. He inspired me to prepare for promotion, and I believed perhaps I had something to offer. Effective mentoring made all of that happen.

I experienced several other mentor relationships as I moved into leadership positions. I owe all of these men a debt of gratitude. They chose to pour their lives into mine, giving me their wisdom, understanding and discipline. They made more of an impact on my life than I realized at the time.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring involves more than just passing along facts, skills and techniques. Mentoring transfers values, principles, ethics and attitudes. Mentoring is character development. As such, mentoring

takes time, a close personal relationship and patience.

Mentoring is selective. You must prioritize the demands made on your time. You cannot effectively mentor more than a handful of people in your lifetime, so choose wisely. Carefully select those you believe possess potential and a strong desire for pursuing excellence. You are passing on your legacy.

Encourage

All of my mentors were great encouragers. They made me believe I could accomplish ambitious goals. I still remember Najera saying, "We can cut the burglaries in this neighborhood to a handful if we can just get all the hypes [heroin addicts] in the slammer and all the truants off the streets and back in school. You have a nose for this kind of work. We can do this." In the early days of my career, I was not secure in my ability. I needed someone to see some appar-

ent potential and push me. I needed reinforcement.

Guide

New members in a tightly knit social group—e.g., police—need a compass. Peer pressure can be great. Lines of right and wrong get fuzzy in the matrix of the criminal world. Sometimes it seems the ends really do justify the means. The strong desire to gain acceptance in an elite group, highly dependent upon one another for life itself, can prove overwhelming. Mentoring involves providing the reasoned, clear and stable plumb line of right and wrong. It means taking the time to thoroughly discuss and model the very best of professional ethics. We live in a world of relative morality. In such a world, mentoring means courageously drawing the line when and where it must be drawn. It means providing a moral/ethical compass when the way appears uncertain.

Restrain

Restraint, the gutsy part of mentoring, usually involves some action to stop your colleague from going down the wrong path. It's the natural end game of guidance. Once you've drawn the line, you must possess the courage to take action if you see your colleague begin to cross that line. Your own restraint is as practical as physically stopping your partner from using excessive force at the end of a pursuit. It can mean ordering that potential future chief to go home when you know their family suffers from their out-of-balance life and compulsive and excessive addiction to the job. In mentoring, restraining means correction. It means action.

Conclusion

Every aspect of mentoring requires patience. Character development—what mentoring is—takes time. Few people enjoy being prodded to achieve higher levels of accomplishment. Most people feel some resentment when confronted about something that deep inside they know is unethical. A wise proverb applies here: "There is one who speaks

rashly, like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Solomon, circa 900 B.C.). True mentors bring healing.

How do you demonstrate gratitude when you benefit from a mentor? Words of thanks are very appropriate and will be appreciated. But a true mentor will encourage you to express your gratitude by becoming a mentor

yourself—on point.

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