

**T**he new sergeant will attend a first line supervisor's class or school for a few weeks to learn leadership, operations, motivation, critical thinking and decision-making, people skills, communication and public speaking and a host of other useful techniques, tactics and strategies. At the conclusion, the new sergeant will feel more confident and be better prepared. However, just as the basic academy training cannot prepare the officer for every contingency and situation encountered on the street, neither can the supervisor's school.

The managers and leaders in the police department have a responsibility to the new supervisor to reduce the number of mediocre and failing supervisors. They can do this by having an established and competent lieutenant or captain coach, and mentor the newly promoted sergeant. Most departments have field-training officers to coach and mentor rookies. This is seen as worthwhile and part of becoming an effective police officer. The same consideration should be given to newly promoted sergeants.

Much of the learning of skills by supervisors and managers is by experience, rather than formal training. Managers are more likely to learn relevant leadership skills and values if they are exposed to a variety of developmental experiences on the job, with appropriate coaching and mentoring by superiors. The new supervisor and manager can also learn appropriate values and behaviors from superiors who provide positive role models for them to emulate. The development of subordinates is a major responsibility of most leadership/managerial positions, but it seldom receives the attention it deserves from managers preoccupied with immediate problems.

Mentors may facilitate adjustment, learning and stress reduction during difficult job transitions, such as newly promoted sergeants, and managers transferred or promoted to a different unit. Research on mentors finds that they provide two types of functions for the individual being mentored: a psychosocial function that includes acceptance, encouragement; and counseling and a career facilitation function that includes sponsorship, protection, challenging assignments, exposure and visibility. Recent studies show that mentoring results in more career advancement and success for the person mentored.

Not only the individual being mentored can benefit from this practice. Mentors may also benefit from the mentoring experience, because it is likely to increase their job satisfaction and help them develop their own leadership skills. In fact, studies in a service company found that managers who were more successful in terms of advancement provided more mentoring to subordinates: mentoring given and mentoring received both predicted career success of managers.

Coaching and mentoring can have a variety of



# Mentor The First Line Supervisor

potential benefits. It can foster mutually cooperative relationships between the captain or lieutenant and the new sergeant. The captain or lieutenant facilitates the sergeant's career advancement, and the sergeant reciprocates by being helpful, cooperative and loyal to the captain or lieutenant. Coaching and mentoring helps identify and prepare subordinate officials to fill positions of greater responsibility in the police organization. It can increase subordinate job satisfaction and commitment to the police organization. Further, for the mentor, developing subordinates can provide an intrinsic reward from helping others grow and develop.

## Identify Needs

A first step in developing skills in a new sergeant is to determine what he knows and prepare him for his new position. This can be identified by any discrepancy between current skills and required skills. It can also be discovered by asking the sergeant what skills or knowledge a subordinate wants to enhance. This can be a lot, especially in large departments with a wide diversity of specialized duties. A detective of many years being promoted to a sergeant in a patrol squad may be behind the curve in conducting inspections, handling major traffic accidents, critical missing persons, conducting community meetings or a litany of other basic supervisory patrol functions.

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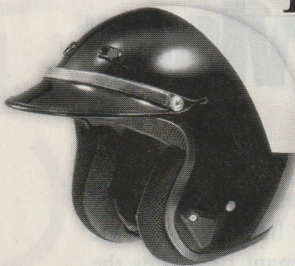
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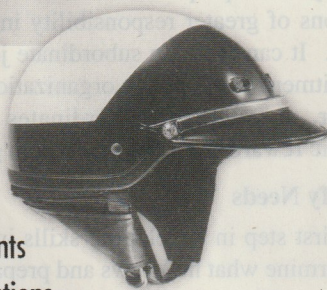
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If the sergeant knows why learning is important, he is more likely to participate. Thus, it may be helpful to relate the training content to the person's needs, interests and career ambitions. Describe learning objectives in terms of specific knowledge or behaviors that relate to job requirements rather than vague personality abilities or traits. Using the example of the detective becoming a patrol sergeant, it should be explained that he will be required to conduct community meetings with the residents in his patrol area and it will be necessary to learn how to effectively run those meetings.

#### Self-Confidence

Coaching is more successful if the sergeant is confident he will be able to succeed in learning the skills. Start at an appropriate level of difficulty and proceed at an appropriate pace. Provide opportunities for the person to experience progress and success in mastering the material and learning the skills. Be patient, and don't criticize or demean the person when mistakes occur.

Part of the patrol sergeant's duties may include handling the scene and paperwork on a departmental scout car accident. It may be more appropriate to start off with a

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scout car accident with no injuries and minor damage that was clearly the fault of the other driver, rather than one that the scout car needs towing, both the officer and the civilian sustained injuries, and conflicting statements and evidence as to who caused the accident are present. As the new sergeant successfully completes less complex tasks he will become more confident to perform more difficult duties. A new detective's first case is never a homicide.

Increase comprehension and recall during coaching by building on the sergeant's prior knowledge of the subject. Focus attention on important things when making explanations. Use examples, diagrams or pictures to help make a complex idea easy to understand and remember. Procedures should be explained step by step, using clear, simple language and helpful examples. Provide necessary detail in instructions. If the task requirements or procedures are very complex, provide written instructions in addition to verbal ones. Use periodic summaries and restatements to stress key points.

The newly promoted patrol sergeant conducting his first community meeting may have prior knowledge of the subject. The detective may have testified many times in grand juries or trials. The coach can build on these communication skills in preparing the sergeant for the community meeting. The new sergeant can be provided with an outline or agenda that needs to be covered in the meeting,

including new police initiatives, crime prevention tips, the crime report, crime trends, commendable performance of duty by patrol officers in the neighborhood and open questions.

### Facilitate Learning

When providing coaching, check to ensure that subordinates know prerequisite concepts, terms, symbols, rules and procedures before trying to teach things that require this knowledge. Patrol sergeants may be required to investigate citizens' complaints against police officers in their squad. If the department has just four outcomes for complaint resolution—sustained, not sustained, exonerated or unfounded—it is important that the sergeant has a firm grasp on what these terms mean and when and how they apply. Each outcome can be a component to be learned separately.

### Practice with Feedback

It may be helpful to have the sergeant practice procedures or tasks, then critique the session. Explain why something was done incorrectly and help the sergeant understand how to do better. Mistakes need to be learning experiences, not personal failures. Reinforce progress and specific learning accomplishments.

The new sergeant may rehearse his first presentation for a community meeting with the lieutenant or captain. He can then receive feedback on the content and presentation of the practice session. The patrol sergeant could be given hypothetical examples or past cases of civilian complaint investigations and asked to render a finding of sustained, not sustained, exonerated or unfounded and explain why they came to that conclusion. The lieutenant or captain can then provide feedback on the sergeant's findings and explanations.

### Ample Time

A common mistake is to try to coach complex skills quickly by cramming too much into a short period of time. Coaching is a process that may involve complex skills that need to be conveyed over weeks and months. It involves opportunities for practice and review. The new sergeant will be tasked with many new duties that involve complex activities that can benefit from coaching.

Coaching is not a task that is completed in days or weeks—it is an ongoing process. Skills needed by the new sergeant can be broken down. For example, one week can be dedicated to each of the following duties: conducting effective roll calls, conducting community meetings, how to handle a critical missing person, dealing with civil disturbances and notification procedures for a critical event.

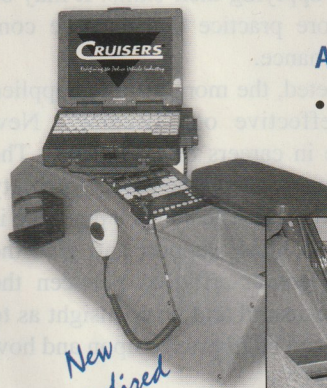
### Verify Success

An important step in coaching is to verify that the targeted skills and knowledge have been learned successfully. One approach is to have the sergeant demonstrate proficiency in the learned activities. This may be nothing more than the lieutenant or captain attending a community meeting run by the new sergeant. It may be nothing more than the lieutenant or captain signing off on the citizen com-

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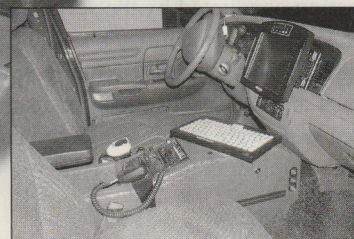
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plaint investigations written by the new sergeant, or the scout car involved accident investigation conducted by the new sergeant.

### Skill Application

After coaching the sergeant on a skill, encourage him to apply concepts, theories, principles or procedures in solving actual work-related problems. A useful approach is to meet with the sergeant a couple of times after the training to discuss progress in applying the new skills and to provide encouragement and support. New sergeants need to be encouraged and pushed into applying their skills. It may be uncomfortable, but with more practice comes more confidence and increased performance.

The more a task is completed, the more a skill is applied the more confident and effective one becomes. New sergeants should not engage in careers of avoidance. The coaching lieutenant or captain can attend the first community meeting conducted by the sergeant. The coach's presence is not to run the meeting, but to show support and give the sergeant confidence. After action critiques between the coach and the sergeant can be useful and bring insight as to what went right and if things can be improved upon and how to accomplish them.

### Show Concern

A basic principle of mentoring is to have genuine concern for the personal development and career progress of subor-

dinates. A lieutenant or captain should encourage each subordinate to set ambitious career goals that are realistic in terms of the officer's ability and consistent with the officer's interests. Encourage the officer to set specific goals for self-development. Respond to requests for advice or assistance. Recognize the benefit and recommend details to a sergeant. A patrol sergeant may not see the benefit of a detail to communications, the information technology unit, youth services or some other specialized unit. But a working knowledge of these units may serve him well, not only at exam time or at the assessment board, but also in day to day operations.

### Provide Advice

One form of career advice is to help a subordinate identify specific strategies to achieve their career objectives. A lieutenant or captain may identify career paths and promotion opportunities in the organization and explain the advantages and pitfalls of various assignments or potential job changes. Sometimes it is useful for a manager to share insights learned from experience with problems or choices similar to those now faced by a subordinate.

### Encourage Training

Another way to facilitate skill development by subordinates is to keep them informed about relevant training and development opportunities. They should be encouraged to enroll in courses that will be helpful to them. Outside experts can be brought in to conduct special training sessions for

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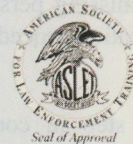
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subordinates. The new sergeant may not subscribe to police practitioner publications listing training that is available.

The new sergeant may not have contacts at a university or prosecutor's office, where outside experts can come in to conduct special training sessions. Don't overlook training courses offered by other police departments. Many will welcome additional students at little or no cost to the department. Use contacts to actively seek them out.

### Opportunities for Development

One way to develop a subordinate's skills and confidence is to provide special projects and assignments that require the subordinate to assume new responsibilities and apply new skills. These may involve delegation of responsibilities previously carried out by the lieutenant or captain, like conducting a meeting or presenting a proposal to executives in the department. Involving subordinates in important decisions and planning strategies for improving the effectiveness of the unit can also enhance skill and confidence.

A sergeant could be assigned the task of analyzing a theft from auto problem at a commuter parking lot, developing a plan to reduce the thefts and then present his recommendations to the district or sector commander. A sergeant could be assigned the task of planning the police response for a special event like a concert in a public park.

### Learn from Experience

The best remembered things are often the things that a person discovered alone and mistakes made when trying to complete a challenging task. Research conducted on executives found that many of their most important lessons. It is sometimes the best approach for developing skills to assign a challenging task without giving detailed instructions, and allow the person to discover how to carry out the task and to deal with problems encountered along the way. This guideline will probably happen many times without the coach and mentor.

The role of the coach and mentor is not to be a 24/7 hand holder. There are many challenging tasks the sergeant can take on and learn from the experience. Motivating unproductive personnel, handling minor incidents of insubordination, or settling differences between two officers can be important learning experiences. Or, the sergeant can be assigned to handle the drag racers that have been showing up late Saturday night in the warehouse district.

### Promote Reputation

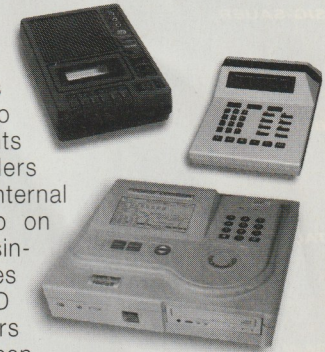
A lieutenant or captain can promote the reputation of a sergeant by telling superiors and peers about the sergeant's achievements and expertise. The sergeant's visibility and contacts can be enhanced by selecting him to serve on committees or projects that provide an opportunity to interact with important people in the department. High-visibility assignments provide an opportunity for a subordinate to demonstrate competence in carrying out important duties.

A sergeant may have an interest and expertise in traffic enforcement. He could then be recommended to sit on the committee considering the implementation of red light cameras. Or, a sergeant may have a special rapport with residents in his neighborhood—he could then be recommended

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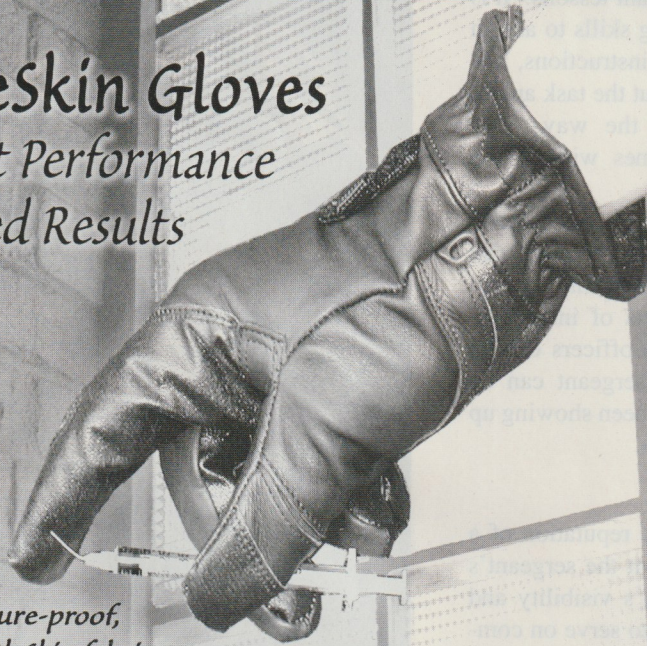
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to sit on a committee reviewing ways to improve community policing. A sergeant may have employed an effective tactic to reduce the number of trouble causing truants. This success can and should be passed on to superiors and peers.

### A Role Model

Much of the interpersonal and professional behavior that is effective in police work can be learned by observing police officials who are competent, effective and experienced. Leaders and managers should demonstrate effective behavior and attitudes in the workplace and set an example for subordinates to imitate. Role modeling is especially useful for subordinate police officials moving into new duty assignments.

### Recognize and Praise

Recognition reinforces a job well done and can lead to repetition of that same behavior. Search out successful work and people will do more of it. Once a coach has established and acknowledged that a sergeant is doing some specific things well, he has identified a solid launching pad for the next task or duty. The skill the employee has displayed and the coach has praised may help illustrate that the sergeant is capable of meeting high performance standards. The coach's praise can also help forge a trusting relationship between the coach and the sergeant.

Mentoring and coaching applies not just to sergeants but can be helpful and effective as an officer moves to each higher level of responsibility. Peer mentoring and coaching should also be considered as members move laterally to new positions, like patrol to communications, or patrol to investigations. It can only serve to enhance the management and leadership in your police department and prepare it for the future.

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