Can Formal Mentoring Increase Knowledge Transfer in the Wilmette Fire Department?

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Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of
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Robert C Bill
Abstract

The problem the Wilmette Fire Department (WFD) faced was a significant decrease in the amount of organizational experience and knowledge within the firefighter rank due to an influx of new department members, multiple internal promotions occurring within a short time span, and a large number of retirements. Mentoring was identified as a useful professional development tool to help prepare these less experienced firefighters for increased responsibilities and critical operational roles. The purpose of the research was to identify successful strategies and integral components of mentoring programs to assist in the development of leadership and management skills of WFD members as they prepared to transition to the role of company officer.

Procedures included a literature review, an external survey of chief officers from accredited fire service organizations, and an internal survey conducted within the WFD. Descriptive and action research methods were used to answer the following research questions: a) what types of mentoring would be appropriate for fire service personnel, b) who should participate in a mentoring program, c) what leadership and management skills are important for fire service organizations to develop in their personnel through mentoring, and d) how can the Wilmette Fire Department expect to benefit from a formal mentoring program? The results of the research indicated mentoring was an important component relating to the growth and development of personnel within successful organizations. Several strategies exist outside the traditional one-on-one relationships that may benefit all types of organizations.

Recommendations included implementation of a mentoring program to include all levels of personnel within the organization, focusing on experiential learning, utilizing reverse mentoring to educate the experienced members and to help bridge generational differences, and
regularly evaluating program effectiveness. A draft mentoring program guideline for the WFD was created as a result of this research.
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Fire service leaders are faced with a constant challenge to provide an increased level of service to their communities, however the limitations set forth on these leaders, such as the continual reduction in operating budgets, have forced many fire chiefs to make personnel decisions that are based upon financial constraints rather than safety and experience. One such challenge replaces sworn company officers with firefighters who “act up” in a company officer role in the absence of a sworn company officer. The Village of Wilmette Fire Department relies heavily on the use of these firefighters as acting company officers on both engine and ladder companies during the absence of a sworn lieutenant. While it can be argued that there are certain benefits to the organization having an acting officer program, there is always debate on how to properly prepare these first-tier fire department members for the increased responsibilities, skills, and tactics required before the member is placed into the officer seat. The problem facing the Wilmette Fire Department is a significant decrease in the amount of organizational experience and knowledge in the firefighter rank due to several reasons: an influx of new department members, multiple internal promotions occurring within a short time span, and a large number of retirements. These rapid and unprecedented personnel changes leave the department in a potentially vulnerable state. Mentoring was identified as a useful professional development tool to help prepare these less experienced firefighters for increased responsibilities and critical operational roles. The purpose of this applied research is to identify successful strategies and integral components of mentoring programs that will assist in the development of leadership and management skills of Wilmette Fire Department members as they prepare to transition to the role of company officer. The results of this research, derived from a comprehensive literature review, two separate survey instruments, and the collection and review of existing mentoring programs
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will be used to develop a formal mentoring program for the Wilmette Fire Department. This applied research project will employ the use of the descriptive and action research methodologies as it attempts to successfully answer the following research questions:

1. What types of mentoring would be appropriate for fire service personnel?
2. Who should participate in a mentoring program?
3. What leadership and management skills are important for fire service organizations to develop in their personnel through mentoring?
4. How can the Wilmette Fire Department expect to benefit from a formal mentoring program?

**Background and Significance**

The Village of Wilmette, Illinois, is a predominantly residential town in the Chicago metropolitan area comprised of 27,400 residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau 2014 estimates (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The Village extends approximately five miles west from Lake Michigan and is approximately one mile wide. Wilmette is located 15 miles north of Chicago in the New Trier Township of Cook County, and is considered to be part of the “North Shore,” a group of affluent communities north of Chicago either bordering or within close proximity to the lake. The Edens Expressway, designated Interstate 94, is a major artery through Wilmette leading in and out of Chicago. The Village is a bedroom community with tree-lined neighborhoods, brick-paved streets, abundant parks, numerous schools and religious facilities, a public library, and various recreational facilities. Wilmette has approximately 650 businesses and four retirement/nursing facilities. Wilmette has its own harbor and several beaches which draw thousands of people to its lakefront annually. The U.S. Coast Guard Station
Wilmette Harbor, a marine enforcement and search and rescue unit, is located within Gilson Park, the large expansive recreation area adjacent to the Wilmette lakefront.

The Wilmette Fire Department (WFD) was established in 1893, approximately twenty-one years after the incorporation of the Village of Wilmette in 1872. Over the next fifty years, the department grew proportionally with the natural westward expansion of the Village. After close to ninety years of growth and expansion, including the merger of two separate municipalities into the present day Village, Wilmette reached its current size and population. The fire department adjusted to the growth and eventually added full-time personnel, ambulance service, and a second fire station. By 1975, the department was a full-time career organization consisting of 44 sworn members and one administrative assistant. The department has maintained close to this sworn staffing level since that time, only adding various support staff as needed. The WFD presently has 45 sworn members, one full-time civilian fire marshal, one full-time administrative secretary, one part-time administrative analyst, and one seasonal part-time fire hydrant maintenance employee.

During the past 30 years, the department was stratified with respect to the experience levels of its members. A new firefighter had many experienced members as informal mentors. This informal mentoring was employed throughout the organization and was one of the principal sources of knowledge and development for the new firefighter.

Beginning in the late 1990s, a philosophical change occurred within the fire department. In 1996, a new fire chief hired from outside the organization resulted in the creation of a new set of organizational priorities. An emphasis on training and education was immediately employed, focusing on the professional development of department members within all ranks. Prior to 1996, the fire department allocated less than $4000 annually for fire department training. The
fire chief immediately observed a need for an increase in training to maintain and/or comply with the Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) standards. The Village was supportive of the new fire chief’s initiative, and responded by increasing the department’s training budget to $40,000 for the next budget year. The training budget increased each successive year, plateauing at over $72,000 (Village of Wilmette [VOW], 1995-2015). This significant increase was due to the push to train all firefighters to the OSFM Firefighter III standard, and the officers to the OSFM Fire Officer I and II levels. The WFD maintained its commitment to professional development and training by designating personnel training as the second highest budget priority, only behind emergency response.

As a part of the professional development process, the department instituted an acting company officer program to provide situational experience for members choosing to pursue company officer positions within the department. Within the training division, minimum service time requirements, educational requirements, and basic skills proficiency levels were developed as a department standard for all acting company officers. Members were encouraged to obtain the Fire Officer I certification through the Office of the State Fire Marshal. At the time these standards were developed, the average experience of a department member acting in a company officer role was 11 years of service.

During the past two years, many personnel changes have occurred causing a significant change to the tiered experience levels within the department. Several experienced officers, including the fire chief and two duty chiefs, retired from the department. Out of the department’s eleven officers, all but two were promoted into new positions within the last calendar year. Four out of six sworn company officers holding the rank of lieutenant have less than three years in their positions. The current command staff, consisting of the fire chief,
deputy fire chief, and three duty chiefs (shift commanders), were promoted to their positions within the first six months of 2015. The result of these organizational changes was an influx of new firefighters hired at a rate previously unknown to the organization.

The flood of new personnel hired during the past five years makes up 48% of the firefighters in the department. The next tier of firefighters, having between five and ten years of experience, makes up only 18% of the firefighters. These two groups combined are 66% of the department’s firefighters (Wilmette Fire Department personnel roster, 2015). Having a large group of relatively inexperienced firefighters creates a problem for the organization. These new firefighters are being pushed into the roles of fire apparatus engineer and acting company officer much earlier in their careers than in past history due to the operational needs of the department. In the past, the natural development of job knowledge, personal communication skills, and many other job-related skillsets would be acquired over a much longer time period. This ensured these newer firefighters had more experience and knowledge of the community, occupancies, geography, and department procedures/policies before being placed into positions with increased responsibility. In the past, the groups of experienced firefighters were balanced equally within the 0-5 year, 6-10 year, 11-15 year, 16-20 year, and 20+ year ranges. The existence of these stratified experience groups encouraged a natural informal mentoring environment within the firefighter rank. There was no rush to develop the newer personnel early in their careers because operationally the department had an adequate number of personnel to operate firefighting apparatus and perform the acting company officer duties.

To promote from the rank of firefighter to the rank of lieutenant, members are challenged with a competitive examination process. Included in this process are the following components: a merit and efficiency rating, an assessment center, an interview, and a written examination.
Aside from a reading list to assist in preparation for the written component, there is no formal process in place to ensure the candidates are prepared for the interview and assessment center components. Many candidates, including those with significant experience, struggled with the assessment center and interview components, reflected by lower scores than other candidates with greater natural leadership skills and presence. These components are related to many of the responsibilities faced by the candidates daily. A structured mentoring program would identify these problem areas and help strengthen the candidate’s skills.

The WFD encourages all of its members to take professional development courses in line with OSFM standards and to be certified to one level past the member’s current rank. For example, a firefighter would obtain training to Fire Officer I, and a lieutenant would obtain training to Fire Officer II. The number of new firefighters choosing to pursue these professional development courses is a greater financial and logistical burden than the fire department can presently support. The department recognized a need for additional means to stimulate professional development, aside from the formal education and informal mentoring components already in place, to ensure that personnel are properly prepared for the advanced roles necessary to maintain the WFD’s operational readiness. With several additional personnel retirements imminent in the next two years, the WFD does not have the option to ignore this problem. The WFD needs to implement a formal mentoring program for its less experienced members to supplement the professional development tools already in place and to increase the rate of knowledge transfer within the organization.

This research project is based upon several objectives outlined by the National Fire Academy and the United States Fire Administration. First, the problem addressed is aligned with the curriculum in the Executive Development course, specifically Unit 3: Exercising Leadership
and Unit 7: Organizational Change. The course goal to “Develop and integrate management and leadership techniques necessary in complex organizations” is also relevant to the research topic (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2013). Second, this applied research project aligns with the strategic initiatives of the United States Fire Administration. Three of the five strategic goals relate to the professional development of personnel: “1) Reduce risk at the local level through prevention and mitigation, 2) Improve local planning and preparedness, and 3) Improve the fire and emergency services’ capability for response to and recovery from all hazards (United States Fire Administration [USFA], 2010, p. 13).” Mentoring and developing personnel are critical tasks towards achieving the USFA’s goals.

**Literature Review**

The purpose of this research is to identify successful strategies and integral components of mentoring programs through a review of literature and applied research. The review of literature to follow will assist with defining specific terminology related to mentoring programs, understanding mentoring concepts, and reviewing mentoring theories from subject matter experts and other researchers as they relate to implementing a formal mentoring program. The material reviewed will directly relate to the problem and purpose statements previously declared, in addition to its relevance to the research questions of this project.

The story of Mentor can be traced back to Homer’s *Odyssey*. Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, departed his kingdom to fight in the Trojan War, and left his trusted friend Mentor to look after and raise his son, Telemachus. Mentor became a father-figure for Telemachus, imparting his knowledge and skills in the young boy as he grew into his role as the prince of his kingdom. The character’s name, Mentor, eventually evolved into meaning a trusted friend, an advisor, a wise person, or person of great knowledge. Throughout the business world the term “mentor”
eventually transformed into a verb, “to mentor,” which means “to impart wise and reliable advice.” “Mentoring,” by definition, is the offering of advice, knowledge, guidance and related experience by a person of skill, knowledge, and expertise for the personal and professional benefit of another less skilled individual. (Luecke & Ibarra, 2004).

Mentoring can be described as an important development process within many occupations where a more experienced member of the organization guides, teaches, and coaches another member of the organization. Historically, the mentor was a higher-ranking individual within the company, however in recent years the trend has shifted where mentors can be peers or lower-ranking individuals. Some companies even implemented a component of a mentoring partnership called a “buddy system,” where new employees are partnered with a coworker to help them assimilate to an organization’s culture and norms rather than in a mentoring relationship designed to facilitate personal and professional development (DuBrin, 2011).

The concept of coaching, a term often used synonymously with mentoring, is similar to the aforementioned “buddy system.” Coaching and mentoring, however, are not the same. Coaching can be described as an important function of mentoring, with a predominant focus on developing specific skillsets, behaviors, and actions. An employee learning a new skillset to accept a greater role within an organization may be coached by his or her supervisor to gain the necessary knowledge to perform the actions of a new job.

Rothwell & Chee (2013) describe mentoring and coaching as fundamentally different, in that mentoring focuses on the professional growth and development of the mentee, while coaching is limited to the coachee’s job performance. Mentoring and professional development is broadly focused, has long-term developmental goals, and concentrates on general skills and
knowledge rather than specific tasks. Coaching is shorter-term and focuses on the immediate skills and behaviors required to be successful in one’s position (Rothwell & Chee 2013).

Ensher and Murphy (2005) indicated in their research that they believe that coaching is a supportive behavior used in the course of a mentoring relationship. The hiring of a coach to train individuals in specific areas, such as decision-making and interpersonal skills, is indicative of their idea of coaching. Like many other subject experts, they believe coaching is less comprehensive in its scope and is often subject-specific.

Several accepted types of mentoring relationships used in formal mentoring were identified throughout the literature review. Among these, the most commonly used types of mentoring included: one-to-one mentoring, peer-to-peer mentoring, reverse mentoring, and one-to-many mentoring. Gates (2003) cites in his article, "There are four basic format combinations: formal or informal and one-to-one or group/peer mentoring. Each format has its advantages and disadvantages, and the goals of the individual and/or organization should drive the decision of which combination(s) to choose" (p. 105).

Dennis Rubin, in his article in *Fire Chief* (2014), states that one of the top leadership priorities for organizational leaders is to help develop all of the people under their command. Empowering all members to be successful, contributing members within their organizations is the ultimate goal. Rubin (2014) relates that a great leader cannot pick and choose who to mentor; the leader is responsible for developing everyone under their command and cannot limit mentoring opportunities to those personnel that are liked more than others. Personnel within an organization will not all share the same motivations and enthusiasm to develop professionally. Individuals should be coached and mentored at their own pace; allowing faster learners to help
develop slower learners will provide mentoring experience for those faster learners and brighter department stars (Rubin, 2014).

Joel Walker (2011), a United States Air Force 1st Lieutenant, observed informal mentoring relationships develop daily during his tenure in the armed forces. Motivated airmen would find others with similar goals and mentoring relationships would ensue. Walker even observed unmotivated and uninspired airmen turn their careers around when engaged by the right mentor. The Air Force stressed to its personnel that mentoring will occur within the service, but with an understanding that all parties will enter into mentoring relationships freely and the strategies and boundaries set within the relationship will remain the decision of the involved personnel (Walker, 2011).

In 2009, a mentoring program was instituted at the Z. Smith Reynolds (ZSR) Library at Wake Forest University. To create their mentoring program, a committee was formed to review professional literature on mentoring, to draft guidelines describing the responsibilities of all participants, to solicit input from library faculty on the program guidelines, and to identify possible effective mentoring types and strategies. As the program began to take shape, the committee members all agreed that multiple strategies and mentoring types needed to be included in the program to successfully facilitate transfer of knowledge and expertise. The ZSR mentoring committee employed the traditional one-to-one mentoring model to pair experienced employees with lesser experienced counterparts. ZSR also embraced the peer-to-peer mentoring model, referred to by ZSR as collaborative peer mentoring. Their collaborative model emphasizes “professional development where all involved learn from each other through a relationship of mutual respect,” a concept originally stated by professional development expert Chris Perry (2000). The collaborative approach has shown to develop a sense of community
among all the librarians, with many opportunities to engage with one another. (Keener, Collins, & Johnson, 2012).

Peer mentoring is embraced by Gates (2003) as it is a practical mentoring strategy used in fire departments where the number of personnel interested in participating in a mentoring relationship greatly exceeds the number of available mentors. Another benefit of peer-to-peer mentoring is the development of mutually challenging partnerships between mentees that encourage the lateral exchanging of ideas between equals; these relationships are based more on reciprocal influence rather than downward influence as evident in a more traditional supervisor/subordinate relationship (Gates 2003). According Luecke & Ibarra (2004), many newer middle level managers surveyed indicated that access to a network of peers was an important part in their successful mentoring experiences. These managers felt that the relationships they held with their peers was more important and beneficial to their development than the relationships held with their superiors.

According to recent article by Stackpole (2014), reverse mentoring is a type of mentoring that gained popularity in the 1990s after the CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, implemented a program to leverage younger employees’ knowledge of technology and the internet to coach the company’s top management and executives. Other companies, including Proctor & Gamble, Cisco Systems, and insurance-giant The Hartford, followed suit and formalized their own reverse mentoring programs to take advantage of the expansive technical knowledge held by their growing millennial workforce. Stackpole (2014) states that this coaching process was used to teach older, less-technically proficient employees how to use new technologies for strategic business advantage. In addition to the skills aspect of this process afforded to the older members of the workforce, it also gave insight into millennials’ aspirations and goals. This insight
enabled these larger companies to create a workplace culture designed to keep millennials engaged and motivated as they became a predominant group in the workforce (Stackpole, 2014). Stackpole also relates that millennials are not as caught up in the hierarchies normally present within organizations, thereby making communication across boundaries, such as rank, title or perceived status, a non-issue.

Willing (2015) states the benefits from reverse mentoring can be substantial, as younger workers bring different skillsets and perspectives to the fire service. People entering the fire service today have educations that reflect the most current trends and knowledge, and most have the energy and desire to rapidly advance and make their mark within an organization. They come into the job looking to build a career for themselves, and see the organization differently than the experienced officer that may view the organization from the standpoint of someone winding down in their career. Willing (2015) also relates that while it would make sense that both younger members and experienced members could both benefit from a reverse-mentoring relationship, the concept has not been well-received by the fire service. The traditional norms of fire service organizations expect new members to “keep their mouths shut and their ears open” for several years as they wait their turn to progress. Reverse mentoring contradicts this cultural norm and therefore creates a barrier to this type of mentoring. Willing (2015) goes on to say that a progressive fire service organization that chooses to embrace reverse mentoring stands to benefit by gaining the skills from its new employees. Implemented properly, reverse mentoring maintains the traditional fire service hierarchal structure, but utilizes all the resources of its personnel while creating a respectful and learning-centered environment (Willing, 2015).

Lt. Colonel Jason Knight (2011), a squadron commander in the United States Air Force, relates that in order to successfully mentor personnel, a basic understanding of generational
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differences is absolutely paramount. Similar to what Knight (2011) describes within the Air Force, this is the first time in history where fire service has members from four distinct generations in the workforce. Most often, mentoring is thought of something only the older generations in leadership positions can do, but Knight (2011) disagrees as he feels there are many opportunities for the younger generations to “reverse mentor” the older generations. Generational differences are often thought of as barriers to mentoring between the generations, where Knight (2011) believes that the differences are actually assets in that each generation brings a specific set of skills and knowledge that is collectively beneficial to the organization’s mission. Mentoring programs can be used to bridge gaps between generations, provided that generational issues are acknowledged and incorporated into the development of professional development programs. Successful leaders identify each generation’s values in order to play to their strengths (Knight 2011).

The concept of online mentoring has increased in popularity with advent of internet technology enabling communication without distance limitations. The Center for Public Safety Excellence (2013) employs an online mentoring program for chief fire officers that matches mentors and mentees worldwide to address areas of need for the mentee. They use a comprehensive application instrument that identifies areas of expertise and need among mentors and mentees, and then pairs them accordingly. The mentoring relationships are short-term, usually lasting only three months in duration, and are designed to address certain skill deficiencies (Center for Public Safety Excellence, 2013). Mentoring partnerships traditionally have a personal component within the relationship, and it can be safely inferred that this type of mentoring partnership would initially lack this component. However, it can also be inferred that this type of mentoring, especially because of the similarities between mentor and mentee, would
expand both participant’s professional network and would also be a foundation for a future mentoring relationship.

Ellen Ensher and Susan Murphy (2005) offer a different perspective on mentoring relationships by claiming that traditional mentoring has several drawbacks as compared to their concept of power mentoring. They feel that traditional mentoring relationships are often based upon outdated career assumptions and can be difficult to obtain due to the demand for mentors outweighing the supply within an organization. Ensher and Murphy (2005) feel that spontaneously developed mentoring relationships are more effective than those that are intentionally paired together, as is common within formal mentoring programs. They contend that power mentoring focuses on the mentee building mentoring networks, and includes having access to multiple groups or mentors rather than cultivating only a one-on-one mentoring relationship. Traditional mentoring relationships tend to be about “like attracts like,” where a power mentoring relationship is often between dissimilar individuals that have complementary skills and needs (Ensher & Murphy, 2005, p. 20). In another significant departure from the norms of traditional mentoring, power mentoring has little regard for organizational boundaries with respect to developing professional relationships. Mentors and mentees may be from same or different types of organizations; sometimes even relationships will develop among competitors due to loyalties within their professions as opposed to short-term loyalties to their companies (Ensher & Murphy, 2005). Power mentoring is described as a contemporary, dynamic, and flexible approach to mentoring employed within organizations where a traditional mentoring approach may not work. Organizations that are flatter in hierarchy and regularly operate outside their boundaries by partnering with other business groups are more likely to benefit from power mentoring (Ensher & Murphy 2005).
Great leaders often become great mentors (LeDuc, 2013). LeDuc (2013) goes on to explain that a good leader must develop great vision to always be steps ahead of the current organizational pace. Characteristics of a great leader include the ability to identify leadership potential in others and see successors to their current role before an existing need. LeDuc (2013) continues by stating that identifying key personnel in your organization that possess leadership skills and vision is vital to successful succession planning; organizations that cannot identify these key personnel or choose to ignore the “writing on the wall” will ultimately fail when their leaders leave the organizations and there is no one prepared to take their place. Mentoring is an important tool that provides this vision to organizational leaders and is a vital component of succession planning within an organization (LeDuc, 2013).

Carl Saffell (2013) concluded from his research that all roles within a fire service organization are key roles and are important to develop as part of an organization’s succession plan. Preparing a firefighter to take an engineer or company officer role is a critical task to ensure personnel are not placed into a position where they are likely to fail. Saffell also relates that mentoring is more crucial at the company officer and chief officer levels as the skill sets needed to succeed, such as problem solving and critical thinking, are less mechanical compared to those skills taught at the firefighter and engineer levels. He continues stating that, “Incident command, culture, people skills, and public interactions are the components that can be compromised with younger and less experienced officers. Conceptually, these can be taught, but they are the skills that are harder to develop effectively” (Saffell, 2013, p. 36).

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) publishes the Officer Development Handbook (ODH), an invaluable reference for any member of the fire service regardless of rank or role. This IAFC publication is an instrumental guide for existing and
emerging fire service leaders that are committed to professional development throughout the duration of their careers. According to the IAFC (2010), “Professional development is the planned, progressive, life-long process of education, learning, self-development, and experience” (p. 1). Professional development takes place in three different ways: through experience, mentoring, and education. The authors of the ODH feel the fire service, like many other public agencies, rely too heavily on education and training to fill the needs of professional development. According to the ODH, a very common approach to professional development efforts are approximately 70% education and 20% mentoring, leaving a mere 10% to experiential learning as a means for development (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010). The IAFC (2010) suggests a more proven strategy by reversing the typical allocation of resources. By weighting experience at 70%, mentoring at 20%, and education at 10%, it embraces the IAFC position that people learn best from experience. IAFC (2010) expands by stating that the right kind of experiential learning is key for success. Opportunities for personnel to gain beneficial experience must be challenging, visible within the organization, and involve more than a superficial introduction to new roles. Lombardo and Eichinger (2008) state that experiential learning can almost always be obtained in-house, as opportunities exist within most public safety agencies. Such opportunities can be as simple as a transfer from the line to a staff position encompassing a different set of responsibilities, participation in task groups as both a member and a group leader, and adaptive and strategic challenges. Without significant additional challenges, vertical-only promotions do not help personnel learn and more often lead to stagnation within a position (Lombardo & Eichinger 2008). They say that experience is the best teacher. They further explain that skill development can be as high as 75% to 90% when learned
on the job with events happening within the workplace environment; these events have the most significant impact on learning (Lombardo & Eichinger 2008).

Experiential learning is directly tied to mentoring. When personnel are given opportunities to engage in experiential learning, they will almost always benefit from the guidance of a mentor. Department leaders can identify up-and-coming leaders and provide experiential learning opportunities within the current department structure. Lombardo and Eichinger (2008) indicated that people who developed the most over their careers had a wide variety of role models and mentors to observe and learn from, similar to power-mentoring relationships. Good bosses, bad bosses, and mentors all had a similar impact on the development of personnel, as the manner in which they challenged personnel on an intellectual level was most impactful rather than what was actually taught to them (Lombardo & Eichinger 2008).

LeDuc (2015) relates that chief fire officers should shift their focus from compartmentalized areas such as training, communications, and operations to address a more complex working environment. Mentoring should include areas such as emerging and rapidly changing technologies, cultural and generational influences in the workforce and the changes they are mandating, unprecedented economic challenges, and higher stakeholder expectations as examples. LeDuc (2015) goes on to state that while knowledge in these areas from formal education and other training can be shared with future department leaders, it is more beneficial for the personnel being developed and mentored to be placed into challenging situations in order for them to gain the knowledge and experience from both success and failure.

Ward and Rhodes (2011), in their Fire Engineering article where they contrast mentoring from the perspectives of the rookie and the veteran, state an issue present within many organizations: “As a veteran member, you have to let go of wanting to be the star of the show
and focus your attention on creating stars” (p. 58). Veteran leaders are always mentoring, whether they know it or not. Actions, words and attitudes of the veteran must always be beyond reproach. Lastly, veteran leaders need to always lead by example, and from the front (Ward & Rhodes, 2011). Ward and Rhodes (2011) define explicit mentoring as a duty to pass along knowledge and experience to the other members of the organization. They cite several examples of skills and strategies used to develop personnel:

- Having personnel ride in a new position and allowing them to make decisions while being coached by experienced personnel,
- Challenging personnel, while also allowing personnel to make mistakes and learn from them provided safety is not compromised,
- Using feedback sessions regularly to discuss how personnel came to certain decisions, rather than focusing on the decisions themselves,
- Role-playing scenarios that enable decision-making at a level above one’s comfort zone, and
- Slowing-down evolutions to explain the how and why of what actions and conditions exist.

Ward and Rhodes (2011) conclude that the keys to success in developing personnel is creating learning opportunities for them. Finding the strengths and weaknesses of personnel, and creating challenges that remove them from their comfort zones will help strengthen both the members and the organization.

In his applied research project, Justice (2014) relates that his research recommends that personnel should be developed in the areas of leadership, written and verbal communications, team building, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution and disciplinary procedures, counseling
and performance evaluation, crew resource management, risk management, and planning/time management (p. 30). Justice (2014) continues stating that mentoring relationships should be developed between newly promoted personnel and seasoned veterans within ranks to encourage job-knowledge transfer and to address critical skills and tasks related to the new officer’s role. Written evaluations throughout and immediately after the conclusion of the mentoring relationship should be completed to identify strengths, weaknesses, and aspects of the mentoring program that require improvement (Justice 2014).

Johnson and Ridley (2008) offer three relevant guidelines with respect to facilitating growth and development in learning. First, a mentor must create challenges with incremental difficulty to allow for a continued path of growth. Second, a mentor should analyze the personal qualities, talents, and interests of each mentee and provide challenges that are appropriate to the mentee’s need for development. Lastly, a good mentor will help a mentee manage anxiety. Anxiety is commonplace when introduced to expectations of growth and challenge. Mentees must have the support of a mentor to reassure them that anxiety is a normal component of the learning process and should not be a deterrent to their success (Johnson & Ridley, 2008).

Courage to accept both success and failure must be instilled in personnel throughout the mentoring process (Viscuso 2014). Viscuso (2014), an experienced instructor in officer and leadership development within the fire service, believes the need to inspire and motivate personnel is crucial to successful mentoring. Creating a vision of where people want to go within their careers will drive them to be self-motivated.

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (2010) supports both informal and formal mentoring processes. They state that informal mentoring is a valuable tool, but it doesn’t necessarily engage the entire organization. The IAFC stresses the benefits of formalizing a
program to ensure that key components are present. By formalizing the mentoring process, it promotes professional growth and inspires career development among all personnel. Additionally, a formal mentoring program supports leadership training and team building. Lastly, by formalizing the mentoring process, it institutionalizes the entire mentoring program (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2010).

The United States Office of Personnel Management published a mentoring guidebook titled, *Best Practices: Mentoring*, in which it describes several organizational benefits derived from mentoring programs. Organizations forecasting tremendous growth or expecting a significant reorganization would benefit from mentoring programs which would help train aspiring managers for their new roles and promoting continuity of service (United States Office of Personnel Management [OPM], 2008). Furthermore, OPM (2008) relates that organizations greatly benefit from mentoring programs, with positive results observed in customer service, career and leadership development, culture change, professional behavior, skills enhancement, employee retention, recruitment, and most importantly, knowledge transfer.

Other organizational benefits from the development of formal and informal mentoring include helping new employees adjust to an organization’s culture, understanding organizational politics, awareness of industry trends that will shape the direction of the organization, and how to view the “big picture” within the company (Rothwell & Chee, 2013). Job applicants and new employees find organizations with established mentoring programs more attractive than those lacking formal mentoring. The existence of a formal mentoring program demonstrates to employees that the organization cares about their development and future success (Rothwell & Chee, 2013).
Mentoring, both informal and formal, is widely embraced within academia, corporate business, and the public sector. Based upon the research conducted by experts cited in this literature review, mentoring provides significant benefits to individuals and their organizations. The many types of successful mentoring strategies provide a basis for developing mentoring programs and relationships in a variety of work environments.

**Procedures**

Descriptive and action research methodologies were used to gather data to both answer the research questions and to assist in the creation of a draft formal mentoring program for the WFD. The author began a comprehensive literature review at the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center (LRC) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, while on campus for the Executive Development course in March 2015. Applied Research Projects (ARPs) from other Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP) students, books, trade journals, and other references were reviewed to educate the author on the subject of mentoring and coaching, past research, and its application in developing a mentoring program for the WFD. An extensive internet search for literature was conducted using the Google search engine and the Google Scholar search tool. This search included, but was not limited to the following keywords: mentoring, mentorship, mentoring programs, coaching, fire service mentoring, professional development, and leadership development. As the primary source for any print materials reviewed, the author utilized the Harper College library in Palatine, Illinois, throughout the duration of the project. Electronic access to the Harper College library facilitated the collection of additional online and electronic-formatted documents.

Primary data to answer research questions one, two, three, and four was obtained by creating a survey instrument utilizing the online tool, SurveyMonkey.com. To assist in the
development of the survey questions, the author utilized the SurveyMonkey (1999-2011) “Smart Survey Design Guide” to ensure that the questions were written based upon best practices. “Survey Sampling Methods” (StatPac, 2014) was used to educate the author on survey population and sampling methodology. Respondents to the survey were required to answer 13 questions, guided by skip logic, based upon whether or not their organization uses a formal mentoring program. The survey question, "Does your current organization use a formal mentoring program as a means to transfer knowledge from more-experienced members to less-experienced members?" determined which questions were shown to a respondent.

The population for the external survey was identified as all fire and emergency service agencies within North America. The two samples were chosen utilizing judgment sampling as defined by StatPac (2014). The first sample group was developed from a list of accredited fire departments supplied by the Center for Public Safety Excellence (CPSE). One chief officer from each of the selected departments was sent a letter explaining the purpose of the research and a link to the online survey. This group was selected due to the increased probability of the respondent’s department employing a formal mentoring program; a criterion in the Center for Fire Accreditation International (CFAI) Fire and Emergency Services Self-Assessment Manual (FESSAM) specifically addresses an organization’s succession planning process. A second sample group consisted of 17 fire departments making up Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) Division 3, geographically located in the northern suburbs of Chicago. The selected departments are regulated by the same OSFM standards and MABAS policies and procedures, and are known to the WFD to use similar operating guidelines. More than half of the selected departments in group two have similar demographics to the WFD. Secondary data to answer research questions one, two, three, and four included the literature review, collection of
mentoring program documents from other fire service agencies, private-sector businesses, and other public-sector organizations, and informal discussions with experienced fire service leaders and chief officers local to the author. To increase the response rate, two incentives were offered to the participants in both sample groups. First, aggregate results of the survey would be provided to any respondent by e-mail request, and second, all respondents that provided personal contact information would be entered into a random drawing for a $25 Amazon.com gift card.

A second survey instrument was created for use internally within the WFD to solicit data specific to research questions one, two, and five. No incentives were offered at the time of the distribution of the survey instrument. The internal survey, a printed paper-based instrument, was distributed to all firefighters, company officers, and chief officers at each of the three shift roll call meetings held at both fire stations. All responses to the survey were in a multiple-choice format requiring the respondent to mark a checkbox with the appropriate response. Respondent groups at each roll call meeting were provided with the survey instrument and a manila envelope to deposit completed surveys. To maintain confidentiality among respondents, minimal demographic information was requested. No personal information was asked in the second survey instrument. The author transcribed the survey results into the SurveyMonkey online survey tool to facilitate aggregation of the data and its subsequent analysis.

Mentoring information, including existing program materials, policies, and guidelines, were requested from colleagues within the author’s networks including the fire service, academia, and the corporate world. External survey participants were also requested to forward any relevant mentoring program materials and information. The identified colleagues were contacted via telephone and e-mail to request mentoring program materials and other information
relevant to the research project. This data was reviewed with any relevant details or concepts discussed within the results section.

In conducting the external survey, the author made several assumptions, and identified some limitations within the results. The author assumed that all respondents to the external survey, regardless of the sample group, had enough fire service knowledge and experience to give reliable answers to the survey questions. The expectation of the author was that the person receiving the introduction letter and survey hyperlink was the fire chief or designated agency head for each organization. It is unknown if respondents chose to participate in the survey purely based on an opportunity to win the stated financial incentive, or if it was for the benefit of scientific research. By utilizing an electronic survey instrument and not requiring personal information on the survey, the author introduced difficulty in following up with respondents who provided write-in answers to several of the questions with open-ended options.

The internal survey had several assumptions and limitations similar to the external survey. The population of the internal survey was all sworn personnel within the Wilmette Fire Department. The entire population was surveyed, as there are presently only 44 sworn members. Several personnel were unavailable due to vacation leave and injury leave at the time the survey was conducted which reduced the number of responses. It was assumed by the author that the respondents had an understanding of the concepts of mentoring and coaching. Since the author required the on-duty personnel to participate in the survey, it is unknown if the answers to the questions were provided truthfully based upon their experiences within the department past and present, or if the survey was completed strictly because of the requirement without regard for the content.
Results

The results of this applied research projects consist of information obtained through the literature review, mentoring program materials and information received, and the data from the two survey instruments. The external survey instrument was introduced to the two sample groups via e-mail, and was completed using the SurveyMonkey.com online survey tool; this survey was sent to 216 recipients with 77 completed responses for a 35% return rate. For ease in reporting results, the external survey respondents were defined by two separate groups. The first group, which will be referred to as the “Program” group, consisted of all survey participants whose departments had an established formal mentoring program; the responses within the “Program” group are based off of the attributes of their organization’s formal mentoring program. Of the 77 total respondents, 36 participants answered questions within this tract. The second group, which will be referred to as the “Knowledge” group, is comprised of fire service leaders with no formal mentoring program within their organizations; the responses within the “Knowledge” group are based upon the knowledge and experience of the respondents. The remaining 41 respondents were included in this tract.

Several general demographics were observed within the external survey instrument. Over 88% of the respondents had more than 20 total years of experience within the fire service, and approximately 49% of the respondents had more than 20 years of experience working for their current organization. Eighty-six percent of the respondents belonged to career fire service organizations, while 14% of the respondents belonged to combination-type fire departments. The size of the organization, as shown in Table 1, was the final demographic captured. Organizations ranging in size from 51 to 99 members represented the majority of the responses with 31%.
Research question number one asked, “What types of mentoring programs would be appropriate for fire service personnel?” This research question was answered with information from the literature review, the external survey, and data gathered from other mentoring programs. The literature tells us that mentoring relationships have proven successful in many forms, and according to Gates (2003), the organization’s goals and needs should influence the types of mentoring relationships implemented. Peer-to-peer mentoring was identified as a successful mentoring strategy for organizations, such as the WFD, where the potential number of mentors are outnumbered by the number of personnel needing to be mentored. Reverse mentoring was also identified as a strategy appropriate for the WFD, as it has been proven to work well within other organizations dealing with a heavy influx of younger workers. Generational differences in the WFD raised issues prior to the rapid loss of experienced personnel through normal attrition and promotion. Bridging these generational differences through mentoring is key to building the relationships necessary for personnel development. The literature review and the survey results confirm the importance of informal mentoring as an adjunct to formal mentoring relationships in situations similar to what is occurring with the WFD.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Size</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 Members</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 50 Members</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 99 Members</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 to 150 Members</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151 to 199 Members</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 or More Members</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. External survey.
The external survey yielded the most influential data for addressing research question number one. It asked in question five, “Does your current organization use informal mentoring as a means to transfer knowledge from more-experienced members to less-experienced members?” Eighty-eight percent of the respondents affirmed their use of informal mentoring within their organizations. As a follow-up to question five for those who affirmed using informal mentoring, respondents were asked to rate how effective transferring of job-related knowledge was within their organizations. Seventy-two percent felt that informal mentoring was either very effective or effective, while 22% answered neutral. Six percent of respondents found informal mentoring was ineffective. This data, combined with the author’s observations within the WFD, reinforces the importance of encouraging and supporting informal mentoring relationships in the WFD.

Question seven from the external survey asked, “Does your current organization use a formal mentoring program as a means to transfer knowledge from more-experienced members to less-experienced members?” Forty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that their organization used a formal mentoring program to support knowledge transfer among their personnel, compared to 53% of the respondents’ departments do not use formal mentoring. In addressing the specific types of formal mentoring relationships and strategies used within fire service organizations, external survey question 19 asked, “Which action strategies or methods are included in your formal mentoring program?” Respondents were asked to select all applicable answers, which showed that peer-to-peer mentoring (one-to-one) is the most common type of mentoring relationship within the sampled organizations. Almost half of the organizations use group mentoring, but reverse mentoring is not prevalent in formal mentoring programs. Respondents without formal mentoring programs answered similarly, but showed
greater support in favor of non-traditional mentoring strategies, such as reverse mentoring and resource groups. Promoting experiential learning, using shadowing, giving feedback and assigning tasks above the employee’s current role, were highly recognized by respondents as important concepts. Table 2 illustrates the action strategies and methods employed in formal mentoring programs (Program group) and the opinions of those participants whose organization had no formal program in place (Knowledge group).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring Strategies and Program Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy / Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-Peer (1 to 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback Sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals / Action Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform Tasks Beyond Present Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. External survey – Number of responses (x).
aResponses from survey participants with an established formal mentoring program. bResponses based on knowledge and experience.

The second research question asked, “Who should participate in a mentoring program?” The literature review and the independent research both conclude that everyone within an organization has something to gain from participating in a mentoring relationship. Fire service organizations committed to developing their personnel and planning for the future understand the need to involve all levels of personnel in their mentoring programs. This philosophy was reflected within the results of the external survey. Table 3 displays the survey responses based
upon participation of specific ranks or groups; these responses are categorized in the two previously defined result groups. The results in Table 3 reflect the importance for all levels of personnel to be included in mentoring activities. Those respondents without formal programs felt strongly about including chief officers and administrative officers as learners, and only slightly more inclined to include trainees and candidates as mentors. WFD members surveyed internally were asked of their interest in becoming a mentor to others within the organization. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents, regardless of present rank or experience level, indicated their willingness to teach and mentor other personnel.

Table 3
Mentoring Program Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Mentees / Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainee / Candidate</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firefighter</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer / Operator</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company Officer</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battalion Chief</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Officer</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Chief Officer</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. External survey – Number of responses (x).

Survey participants with established formal mentoring programs were asked in external survey question 16, “Is your formal mentoring program mandatory for all eligible members of the organization?” Fifty-four percent indicated their programs were mandatory for all eligible personnel, while 38% indicated the program was voluntary. Three respondents, or 8%, indicated “Other,” and explained that it was rank dependent on whether or not it was mandatory in their organizations. The internal survey asked whether WFD members would participate in a formal
mentoring program within the department, to which an overwhelming 97% of the participants indicated they would voluntarily participate.

With a shortage of potential mentors within the WFD, it was important to look beyond the immediate organization for mentors. The assumption was made that most fire service organizations with formal mentoring programs are not using mentors external to their organizations. Table 4 displays the results of the external survey question asking, “From what types of organizations external to your department would you consider utilizing personnel as mentors (check all that apply)?” Both the Program and Knowledge groups were asked to choose from several types of organizations from which they would consider drawing potential mentors. Overwhelmingly, respondents from both groups chose to consider mentors from other fire service organizations, but were not as interested in many of the other options. Other municipal employees from within the same governing agency, and other public sector organizations such as social service and health agencies were the next most likely choices to be tapped. Local schools and universities (49%), local businesses (32%), and local non-profit organizations (20%) were more acceptable to members of the Knowledge group when it came to searching for mentors outside the organization. Respondents from the Program group appeared less likely to consider using mentors from any of the local schools and universities (11%), local businesses (22%), and non-profit organizations (5%). Approximately 5% of the responses, presumably from military personnel, indicated they would choose Department of Defense instructors from within their fire academy and other training centers to act as mentors. Twenty-two percent of respondents from the Program group indicated they would not consider using any mentors external to their organization; the Knowledge group did not appear to be as rigid with only 7% excluding external mentors.
Table 4
Mentors External to the Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Program(^a^)</th>
<th>Knowledge(^b^)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Municipal Employees (same body of government)</td>
<td>38% (14)</td>
<td>51% (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Fire Departments</td>
<td>68% (25)</td>
<td>78% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Public Agencies (social services, health departments, county and township government, etc.)</td>
<td>43% (16)</td>
<td>37% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Schools and Universities</td>
<td>11% (4)</td>
<td>49% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Businesses</td>
<td>22% (8)</td>
<td>32% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Non-Profit Organizations</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
<td>20% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not use mentors external to the organization</td>
<td>22% (8)</td>
<td>7% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. External survey – Number of responses (x).
\(^a^\)Responses from survey participants with an established formal mentoring program. \(^b^\)Responses based on knowledge and experience.

The internal survey asked one question regarding the use of mentors external to the WFD. Seventy-one percent of the WFD members surveyed related they would be willing to be mentored by someone external to the organization, while 29% were not interested in having a mentor from outside the department.

Research question number three asked, “What leadership and management skills are important for fire service organizations to develop in their personnel through mentoring?” This research question was answered with information from the external survey, data gathered from other mentoring programs, and information discovered in the literature review. External survey question 18 asked the participants in the Program group, “Which of the following leadership or management skills are addressed in your formal mentoring program (check all that apply)?” The Knowledge group was asked a similarly worded question and given the same list of choices from
which to select their answers. As expected within a mentoring program, the topics of career path
development, initiative, critical thinking, problem solving skill development, communication
skill development were all represented with a significant number of responses. Conflict
resolution, human resources, resume development, and interviewing skills were deemed
important concepts to include within mentoring based upon the Knowledge group responses.
This question prompted many “write-in” answers which appeared to be very valid and pertinent
concepts in personnel development. These responses include

- budgeting and fiduciary responsibilities;
- safety and risk management;
- the department’s role within the parent government entity;
- organizational culture;
- job classification/role-specific training; and
- department policy application.

Due to the type of survey instrument and platform used, it was impossible to determine which
respondents offered the write-in responses. This limited the follow-up required to get more
specific definitions of the above-listed concepts. Table 5 illustrates the complete results
including response percentages and the differences within the response groups’ answers.

Table 5
Leadership and Management Skills Addressed through Mentoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Program^a</th>
<th>Knowledge^b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Path Development</td>
<td>89% (31)</td>
<td>88% (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Advocacy and Initiative</td>
<td>66% (23)</td>
<td>40% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>83% (29)</td>
<td>80% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational Differences</td>
<td>34% (12)</td>
<td>50% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Skills Development</td>
<td>77% (27)</td>
<td>76% (31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The final research question asked, “How can the Wilmette Fire Department expect to benefit from a formal mentoring program?” This research question was answered with information from the literature review and the internal survey completed by a sample of the sworn members of the WFD. The goal of this research is to create an environment within the WFD that embraces career development while developing inexperienced members for advanced roles such as driver/operator and acting officer. Ultimately, this enhancement of the department’s existing professional development efforts aid in the succession planning goals of the WFD. Viscuso (2014) stated the need to inspire and motivate personnel is crucial to successful mentoring. Creating a vision of where a person wants to go within their career will drive them to be self-motivated. Self-motivated personnel with high-level career aspirations will provide fire departments with personnel ready to accept new roles as dictated by organizational needs. The United States Office of Personnel Management (2008) related that organizations greatly benefit from mentoring programs, with noted positive results in customer service, career and leadership development, culture change, professional behavior, skills enhancement, employee retention, recruitment, and most importantly, knowledge transfer.

Recruitment is a vital component related to the success of an organization. Organizations that recruit quality personnel have a larger talent pool from which to develop its future leaders.
Rothwell and Chee (2013) explained that job applicants and new employees find organizations with established mentoring programs more attractive than those lacking formal mentoring. The existence of a formal mentoring program demonstrates to employees that the organization cares about their development and future success.

For an organization to implement a formal mentoring program and to reap the associated benefits and results, the organization must show commitment and desire to succeed. The internal survey instrument was developed to measure the interest and commitment among all the sworn personnel, from firefighter to fire chief, in employing a mentoring program. Thirty-five sworn members completed the survey from a total of 44 sworn members within the organization. Several demographics were captured within the survey to ensure an accurate sampling of the different ranks and service time levels were represented in the results. The sample data was reflective of the actual department ranks and service times as compared to the current WFD personnel roster. The survey participants were asked to rate several statements using a predetermined unipolar scale consisting of the following choices: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The members who participated in the survey overwhelmingly supported the concept of increasing mentoring partnerships within the organization, and overall felt strongly that the department would benefit from a formal mentoring program. Thirty of the 35 respondents, or 86% of the sample, felt they had significant knowledge to offer other members of the department. Thirty-three of the 35 respondents also indicated they could benefit from skills coaching in specific subject areas. This data alone illustrates a group that is ready to mentor and learn from each other. Tables 6 and 7 show detailed results by response count and numerical average, and supports the conclusion that the
WFD is ready to employ more formalized mentoring partnerships and benefit from sharing its members’ experiences and knowledge.

Table 6

Wilmette Fire Department Readiness for Mentoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The department is providing me with the appropriate amount of training and education to help me advance toward my career goals.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could benefit from technical or skills coaching in a specific area (E.g. report writing, decision-making skills, conflict resolution, technology, budget/finance, advanced tactics, etc.).</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in a mentoring program will help with my career goals.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The entire department would benefit from a formal mentoring program.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a significant amount of job-related knowledge to share with other members.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Internal survey. SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, N = neutral, A = agree, SA = strongly agree. Rating = the aggregate numerical rating based on a unipolar 1-5 scale.

Table 7

Wilmette Fire Department Participation in a Mentoring Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you voluntarily participate in a formal mentoring program?</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you be interested in becoming a formal mentor to another member in the department?</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you be willing to be mentored by an individual or a group that is outside the WFD?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Internal survey.
The results of this research show the WFD members are accepting of the premise of mentoring and the establishment of a formal mentoring program. Almost 90% of the members recognize the potential benefits to the organization by developing a mentoring program.

Six fire departments, one global pharmaceutical research company, and three local school districts responded to the author’s request for mentoring programs. Of the three different types of organizations that sent materials, the most substantial and detailed information came from the fire service organizations. The fire service relies heavily on objective-based training as it ensures consistency throughout the entire training program. Mentoring program documents received from the six fire departments employed traditional mentoring relationships by pairing inexperienced and experienced personnel together to ensure completion and competency of objective-based tasks.

The Montgomery County Fire Department has an extensive probationary firefighter training program consisting of 17 weeks of general knowledge, firefighting knowledge, and EMS skills. The program utilizes a station captain or shift officer as a primary mentor to the new recruit. The recruit is required to complete multiple training modules with extensive documentation and feedback present throughout the process. Logbook forms are completed by the recruit documenting daily activities and progress. These activities and modules are then reviewed with the assigned mentor; this officer then completes a counseling report which documents areas of strength and areas needing improvement (Montgomery County Fire & Rescue Training Academy website, 2015).

The Deerfield-Bannockburn Fire Protection District (DBFPD) employs a comprehensive acting company officer training program. The program specifically outlines a minimum level of training required for a member to act up in a company officer role. Before personnel are allowed
to assume the role of acting officer, he or she must be shadowed by a sworn officer for a specific
time period, usually about 30 shifts or 720 hours, where the officer would ride in the rear of the
crew compartment observing the prospective acting officer riding up front. The DBFPD does a
skills assessment on a member prior to determining how many shifts or hours are required before
that member is deemed a qualified acting officer. Personnel aspiring to become acting company
officers keep a workbook outlining certain skills that need to be demonstrated within the training
period. Daily evaluations and briefings are held between the prospective acting officer and the
shift commander, at the beginning and end of each shift, to document progress and review the
prior shift’s activities (Deerfield-Bannockburn Fire Protection District acting company officer
guidelines, n.d.).

The Morton Grove Fire Department uses a similar acting company officer training
program to the DBFPD. One of the tools used by Morton Grove is a comprehensive feedback
and evaluation form that includes

- detailed accounts of public interactions;
- decision-making situations and resolutions;
- resolution of personnel issues;
- number and description of fire and EMS responses including tactics;
- training class interactions; and
- administrative responsibilities.

This feedback form allows the mentee to describe the experiential learning moments encountered
on each shift when shadowed by their assigned company officer (Morton Grove Fire Department
acting lieutenant training guideline, n.d.).
An anonymous employee of AstraZeneca, a global pharmaceutical company, provided a copy of the company’s mentoring program documents. AstraZeneca promotes mentoring organization-wide and generally facilitates one to one mentoring relationships amongst its employees. There is a framework in place to help establish the relationships, define the boundaries and expectations, and provide overall direction. Mentoring relationships within AstraZeneca are non-reporting, meaning mentee and mentor do not report to one another within a business unit. Employees entering into mentoring relationships spend time in the beginning stages of the partnership by setting expectations and objectives, determining the scope of the mentoring relationship, discussing confidentiality concerns, reviewing time constraints and availability issues, methods for feedback, and any other issues that may be important to either party. Typical mentoring relationships within the company last between 12-18 months, but the time frame is ultimately left to the two individuals within the mentoring partnership.

AstraZeneca’s mentoring program delivers benefits to the entire company by

- providing a disciplined approach to managing and developing a skilled workforce,
- leveraging the leadership capabilities of mentors,
- assisting in the development and retention of employees,
- speeding the development of customer-valued skills,
- promoting the open discussion of new ideas through improved communication, and
- providing career development guidance to employees.

The first-level manager in the company is responsible for discussing career development and introducing career professionals to their employees. They are also responsible for coaching and providing feedback based upon day-to-day performance as it relates to the employee’s developmental goals. Managers perform a supportive role to the entire mentoring process by
mentoring programs from the school districts resembled the AstraZeneca plan in that they were very focused on industry-specific goals and outcomes. The guidelines offered to teachers performing as mentors were aligned with the best practices of other mentoring programs discussed within this project.

With the data from both surveys, a careful review of the relevant literature, and a review of other organization’s mentoring programs, the author has developed a draft standard operating guideline for a formal mentoring program to be established within the WFD. This draft guideline defines the basic framework of the program; describes the roles of the mentor, mentee, and the mentoring program coordinator; and outlines the procedures for selecting mentors for the different mentoring roles within the organization. To begin the formalization process of mentoring within the WFD, the initial mentoring partnerships created will be between new recruits and existing department members. This relationship is designed to help the new member successfully complete the training academy and the two-year probationary period. To address the problem identified as the main reason for this research project, a draft Acting Officer Training Program standard operating guideline was created to ensure firefighters placed into an

encouraging employee participation and empowering employees to take responsibility for their own career development. While much of the AstraZeneca program is tailored towards developing sales and networking skills based upon specific company strategies and goals, the program does provide several smart guidelines to assist mentors in building their relationships with their mentees. The program encourages mentors to act as good listeners by utilizing active listening skills, be open-minded, ask tough questions, employ empathy, and support total honesty (AstraZeneca, 2010).

The mentoring programs from the school districts resembled the AstraZeneca plan in that they were very focused on industry-specific goals and outcomes. The guidelines offered to teachers performing as mentors were aligned with the best practices of other mentoring programs discussed within this project.
acting officer role are trained to a minimum level of competency prior to filling an acting officer role. These two standard operating guidelines can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E.

**Discussion**

A significant portion of a new firefighter’s development can be accomplished through coaching. Before new employees can transition into leadership or mentor roles, they must achieve basic competency to a set of standards. At the beginning of this project, information describing formal mentoring programs was requested from fire service organizations across the country. Several organizations responded and supplied information beneficial to the author’s goal in creating a formal mentoring program for the WFD. As discussed within the literature review, experts in the field of mentoring and coaching clearly define the difference between the two activities. DuBrin (2011) described mentoring as an important development process within many occupations where a more experienced member of the organization guides, teaches, and coaches another member of the organization. Luecke & Ibarra (2004) describe coaching as an important function of mentoring, with a predominant focus on developing specific skillsets, behaviors, and actions. Many of the fire service programs collected and reviewed, designated as mentoring programs by their agencies, were more aligned to the actions of coaching. These programs focused on developing skills commonly found in job-performance requirements (JPRs) for firefighter and company officer ranks. It was difficult to find fire service specific programs written to nurture the development of personnel throughout their entire careers, with less emphasis on specific objective-based skills. It was important to illustrate the difference between the two concepts of coaching and mentoring, only due to the fact that experts within the business, medical, and education worlds consider them to be very different. The fire service is still
relatively young in its formal mentoring efforts at present and should not focus on the difference between coaching and mentoring.

At the onset of the project, specifically when the problem was identified, the focus of the research was to consider using mentoring to increase the knowledge transfer and professional development within a specific group of personnel - aspiring and acting company officers. The literature review and the survey results indicated that formal mentoring should be implemented organization-wide. While not all survey participants agreed that trainees/candidates should be mentors to others within the organization, there is definitely some benefit to listening to and learning from the younger members of an organization. Knight (2011) observed that this is the first time in history that four distinct generations are present within the workforce. He believes that in order to successfully mentor personnel, one needs to have a good understanding of generational differences. Knight (2011) related that opportunities exist for younger members to reverse mentor the older generations and to help bridge some of the generational differences. The results of the internal survey support Knight’s statements in that 97% of the members felt they could offer knowledge to others within the organization, supporting the concept that every employee has something to offer the organization. It is understood that within some organizations, a culture may exist discouraging young employees from sharing knowledge, however the entire concept of reverse mentoring aims to dispel this negative tradition in favor of progression.

Traditional mentoring within the fire service has always developed informally from within the organization between experienced to less experienced personnel. What if the organization finds itself well behind the curve in developing its personnel? What if there are just not enough experienced, knowledgeable, role models within the organization to prepare the next
leaders? Ensher and Murphy (2005) felt that traditional mentoring could be difficult to sustain in an organization with a very limited supply of mentors and a large number of personnel wanting to be mentored. They introduced their concept called power mentoring, built on the premise of the mentee building a network of informal mentors both within and outside their organization. While this method of mentoring could be somewhat limited in the fire service due to the nature of the work and the limited number of opportunities to build networks, their concept has merit. Looking outside the organization to experienced leaders was one solution presented to the members of the WFD and the survey respondents. Surprisingly, 71% of the members of the WFD were receptive to the idea of being mentored by someone from outside the department; this result was unexpected.

The leadership and management skills that should be addressed within formal mentoring are numerous and diverse. The external survey question inquiring about leadership and management skills addressed within a mentoring program had the most write-in responses than any other question. This infers that a mentoring program should include a needs assessment within the partnership to determine strengths and weaknesses of both the mentor and mentee and to find subject areas to focus on developing. Ward and Rhodes (2011) related several skills and strategies that they felt best developed personnel. Placing personnel into new roles and allowing them make critical decisions promotes growth. This strategy is supported by the mentor giving regular coaching to the learner in the new role. Challenging personnel and creating a controlled amount of stress was found to be very beneficial in developing new skills and maintaining steady professional growth (Johnson & Ridley, 2008).

Overall, the results of the research coincide with the thoughts and concepts described in the literature review. The author was not at all surprised at the results from the external survey;
eighty-eight percent of the respondents surveyed had over 20 years of experience within the fire service. The skills necessary to succeed as a chief officer within a fire department should be well-known and easily described, and in many cases incorporated into their professional development and mentoring programs. The author did find the results of the internal survey encouraging. In order for growth and development to occur within an organization, personnel need to accept the responsibility to be good teachers and good learners. A large number of WFD members believe that mentoring can help them in their careers, as well as benefit the entire organization. When personnel buy in to the mentoring and development processes, the organization can only stand to benefit.

**Recommendations**

The results of this applied research project identified several best practice strategies to aid in developing a formal mentoring program for the WFD. Formal mentoring guidelines, in addition to the existing professional development program and informal mentoring should benefit the members WFD and the organization as a whole. Based upon the information learned while researching this project, the author recommends the following:

1) The department should continue to evaluate and build upon the draft formal mentoring standard operating guideline created as a result of this research. Regular evaluation and feedback should occur between participants and the program coordinator to ensure adjustments are made as necessary to meet the needs of both members and the organization. The effectiveness of the program should be measured by monitoring the growth, development, and knowledge gain of all participants.

2) Continue to research strategies used by other organizations inside the fire service and outside in the business and education worlds to find successful implementations of
mentoring. These successes should be analyzed and compared to the existing strategies used with the WFD, and if applicable, added to the mentoring program.

3) The research was intended to address the problem of knowledge gap between inexperienced and experienced firefighters and the loss of organizational knowledge due to attrition. After completing this project, it is clear to the author that all levels of the organization should be included in the formal mentoring process. The inclusion of all ranks and personnel enable the organizations to use mentoring as part of organization-wide succession planning.

4) Continue to provide educational opportunities for members interested in professional development. As suggested by the International Association of Fire Chiefs, create more experiential learning opportunities through shadowing, role playing, and challenges outside a mentee’s regular role and responsibilities.

5) Goals and action items should be established by both mentors and mentees and should include regular evaluation and feedback sessions to ensure continual progress is being made.

6) Empower the newer members of the organization to mentor the more experienced personnel through reverse mentoring. The generational struggles present with such a large influx of new members and a multi-generational workforce provide opportunities to trade knowledge and skills between all levels within the organization. Use all personnel to their strengths and build up their weaknesses.
References


Willing, L. (2015, May 19). What fire chiefs gain from reverse mentoring: With the right boundaries and expectations, young firefighters have a lot to teach the old guard. *Fire Chief*. Retrieved from http://www.firechief.com/2015/05/19/what-fire-chiefs-gain-from-reverse-mentoring/

Appendix A

Dear Chief Officer,

My name is Robert Brill, and I am a Duty Chief with Wilmette Fire Department located in the northern suburbs of Chicago. I am a first-year student in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. As part of the curriculum, I am currently undertaking an applied research project to assist my fire department in developing a formal mentoring program.

You have been selected to participate in a short survey on the subject of mentoring and mentoring plans. The responses you provide will greatly assist my department as we continue towards the same goal.

The Wilmette Fire Department (WFD) has recently become a department very “young” in experience. With a number of retirements, officer promotions, and an influx of new hires unlike any past trend, the WFD is faced with the problem that 50% of its firefighter rank has less than seven years on the job. Previously, the department was stratified enough to allow natural career progression through informal job knowledge transfer and informal mentoring within the firefighter rank. With the department’s present situation, we discovered a pressing need to assist the growth and development of our firefighters so we have competent, experienced and prepared personnel to step into the officer role when needed. We feel one of those ways to is to utilize a formal mentoring program as part of our professional development plan.

As an incentive for completed surveys, I will be giving away one (1) $25 Amazon gift card to a random respondent at the conclusion of the survey. Participation in the drawing is optional, but should you choose to be included, be sure to fill out all of the personal information fields on the final page of the survey. This survey will be open until August 12, 2015, at 6:00pm. All contact information will be kept confidential.

Additionally, if you are willing to share any mentoring materials (plan, policy, procedure, guideline, etc.) that you think may benefit the WFD, please forward them to xxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.com.

Thank you in advance for your time. Below is the link for the survey.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FJWLWCH

Sincerely,

Robert C. Brill
Duty Chief
Wilmette Fire Department
Appendix B

Wilmette Fire Department
Mentoring Survey

As part of our commitment to providing the highest quality service to our community, the department has considered developing a formal mentoring program to assist in the professional growth and development of its members. This mentoring program would supplement the current educational opportunities, and be available to all fire department members interested in participating. Below are a few questions designed to gauge the interest and needs of the members of our organization. The surveys are confidential, meaning your identities will remain anonymous. All results will be presented in a summary fashion. This survey is part of an applied research project for the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy.

1. How long have you been a member of the Wilmette Fire Department?
   A. 0-5 years 29%, 10 responses
   B. 6-10 years 17%, 6 responses
   C. 11-15 years 9%, 3 responses
   D. 16-20 years 14%, 5 responses
   E. Over 20 years 32%, 11 responses

2. What is your rank in the Wilmette Fire Department?
   A. Firefighter 3%, 1 response
   B. Firefighter/Paramedic 71%, 25 responses
   C. Lieutenant 14%, 5 responses
   D. Chief Officer 11%, 4 responses

For questions 3 through 7, please rate each statement.

3. The department is providing me with the appropriate amount of training and education to help me advance towards my career goals?
   A. Strongly Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   B. Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   C. Neutral 5%, 2 responses
   D. Agree 49%, 17 responses
   E. Strongly Agree 46%, 16 responses

4. I could benefit from technical or skills coaching in a specific area (E.g. report writing, decision-making skills, conflict resolution, technology, budget/finance, advanced tactics, etc.).
   A. Strongly Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   B. Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   C. Neutral 5%, 2 responses
   D. Agree 49%, 17 responses
   E. Strongly Agree 46%, 16 responses
5. Participating in a mentoring program will help with my career goals.
   A. Strongly Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   B. Disagree 3%, 1 responses
   C. Neutral 17%, 6 responses
   D. Agree 54%, 19 responses
   E. Strongly Agree 26%, 9 responses

6. The entire department would benefit from a formal mentoring program.
   A. Strongly Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   B. Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   C. Neutral 11%, 4 responses
   D. Agree 51%, 18 responses
   E. Strongly Agree 37%, 13 responses

7. I have a significant amount of job-related knowledge to share with other members.
   A. Strongly Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   B. Disagree 0%, 0 responses
   C. Neutral 14%, 5 responses
   D. Agree 66%, 23 responses
   E. Strongly Agree 20%, 7 responses

8. Would you voluntarily participate in a formal mentoring program?
   A. Yes 97%, 34 responses
   B. No 3%, 1 responses

9. Would you be interested in becoming a mentor to another member in the department?
   A. Yes 97%, 34 responses
   B. No 3%, 1 responses

10. Would you be willing to be mentored by an individual or within a group that is outside the Wilmette Fire Department?
    A. Yes 71%, 25 responses
    B. No 29%, 10 responses
Appendix C

External Survey Instrument

(Edited from the SurveyMonkey.com online survey. Responses in *italics.*

How many total years of experience do you have within the fire service?

| A. 0 to 5 years | 1%, 2 responses |
| B. 6 to 10 years | 0%, 0 responses |
| C. 11 to 15 years | 3%, 2 responses |
| D. 16 to 20 years | 8%, 6 responses |
| E. over 20 years | 88%, 68 responses |

How many years of service do you have within your current fire department?

| A. 0 to 5 years | 14%, 11 responses |
| B. 6 to 10 years | 12%, 9 responses |
| C. 11 to 15 years | 9%, 7 responses |
| D. 16 to 20 years | 16%, 12 responses |
| E. over 20 years | 49%, 38 responses |

What type of organization is your current fire department?

| A. Career | 86%, 66 responses |
| B. Combination | 14%, 11 responses |
| C. Volunteer | 0%, 0 responses |

How many sworn members are in your current fire department?

| A. less than 10 members | 1%, 1 responses |
| B. 11 to 50 members | 22%, 17 responses |
| C. 51 to 99 members | 31%, 24 responses |
| D. 100 to 150 members | 12%, 9 responses |
| E. 151 to 199 members | 7%, 5 responses |
| F. 200 or more members | 27%, 21 responses |

Does your current organization use informal mentoring as a means to transfer knowledge from more-experienced members to less-experienced members?

| A. Yes | 88%, 68 responses |
| B. No | 12%, 9 responses |

How effective is your informal mentoring program in developing job knowledge and skills?

| A. Very effective | 7%, 5 responses |
| B. Effective | 65%, 44 responses |
| C. Neutral | 22%, 15 responses |
| D. Ineffective | 6%, 4 responses |
| E. Very ineffective | 0%, 0 responses |
Does your current organization use a formal mentoring program as a means to transfer knowledge from more-experienced members to less-experienced members?

A. Yes 47%, 36 responses  
B. No 53%, 41 responses  

No formal mentoring program (Knowledge group responses)

You identified that your organization does not currently have a formal mentoring program. The remaining survey questions will draw upon your career experience to answer questions about what you feel should be included in a formal mentoring program.

Which role/ranks do you feel should participate in a formal mentoring program as a learner or mentee (choose all that apply)?

- Trainee / Candidate (less than one year experience) 68%, 28 responses
- Firefighter 83%, 34 responses
- Engineer / Operator 71%, 29 responses
- Company Officer (Lieutenant, Captain, etc.) 93%, 38 responses
- Battalion Chief 85%, 35 responses
- Administrative Officer (Sworn) 61%, 25 responses
- Executive Chief Officer 63%, 26 responses
- Other (please specify) Civilian staff, FPB staff 5%, 2 responses

Which role/ranks do you feel should participate in a formal mentoring program as a mentor (choose all that apply)?

- Trainee / Candidate (less than one year experience) 15%, 6 responses
- Firefighter 66%, 27 responses
- Engineer / Operator 68%, 28 responses
- Company Officer (Lieutenant, Captain, etc.) 95%, 39 responses
- Battalion Chief 93%, 38 responses
- Administrative Officer (Sworn) 63%, 26 responses
- Executive Chief Officer 66%, 27 responses
- Other (please specify) Civilian staff, Senior FF 5%, 2 responses

Do you think that all eligible personnel should be required to participate in a formal mentoring program if one existed in your organization?

A. Yes 42%, 17 responses  
B. No 58%, 24 responses  

From what types of organizations external to your department would you consider utilizing personnel as mentors (choose all that apply)?

- Other municipal employees (same body of government) 51%, 21 responses
- Other fire departments 78%, 32 responses
- Other public agencies (social services, health departments, etc.) 37%, 15 responses
- Local schools and universities 49%, 20 responses
- Local businesses 32%, 13 responses
Local non-profit organizations  
Would not use mentors external to our organization  
Other (please specify) Military/DOD, Chaplin

Which of the following leadership or management skills should be included in a formal mentoring program (choose all that apply)?

- Career path and development 88%, 35 responses
- Self-advocacy and initiative 40%, 16 responses
- Critical thinking 80%, 32 responses
- Generational differences 50%, 20 responses
- Development of problem solving skills 78%, 31 responses
- Communication skills (interpersonal, written, etc.) 85%, 34 responses
- Conflict resolution 93%, 37 responses
- Interviewing skills 38%, 15 responses
- Resume and portfolio development 38%, 15 responses
- Diversity 48%, 19 responses
- Human resources 68%, 27 responses
- Other (please specify) Budgets, Politics, Safety, Risk mgmt. 15%, 6 responses

Which action strategies or methods should be included in a formal mentoring program (choose all that apply)?

- Peer to peer mentoring (one-to-one) 90%, 36 responses
- Reverse mentoring (less experienced mentoring more experienced) 23%, 9 responses
- Group mentoring (one-to-many) 38%, 15 responses
- Individual meetings and feedback sessions 78%, 31 responses
- Shadowing 78%, 31 responses
- Goal setting and action item development 65%, 26 responses
- Resource groups (internal and external) 40%, 16 responses
- Networking 55%, 22 responses
- Opportunities to perform tasks beyond present job 75%, 30 responses
- Incentives for both mentor and learner (financial, merit, etc.) 18%, 7 responses
- Other (please specify) Projects, Acting Officer 5%, 2 responses

**Formal mentoring program (Program group)**

You indicated that your department has a formal mentoring program. The next few questions will ask about some of the specific details of your program.

Which members of your organization participate in the formal mentoring program as a learner or mentee (choose all that apply)?

- Trainee / Candidate (less than one year experience) 76%, 28 responses
- Firefighter 57%, 21 responses
- Engineer / Operator 60%, 22 responses
- Company Officer (Lieutenant, Captain, etc.) 70%, 26 responses
- Battalion Chief 57%, 21 responses
Which members of your organization participate in the formal mentoring program in the role of a mentor (check all that apply)?

- Trainee / Candidate (less than one year experience) 5.4%, 2 responses
- Firefighter 57%, 21 responses
- Engineer / Operator 54%, 20 responses
- Company Officer (Lieutenant, Captain, etc.) 87%, 32 responses
- Battalion Chief 76%, 28 responses
- Administrative Officer (Sworn) 35%, 13 responses
- Executive Chief Officer 49%, 18 responses
- Other (please specify) Designated Trainers, Paramedics 8%, 3 responses

Is your formal mentoring program mandatory for all eligible members of the organization?

- A. Yes 54%, 20 responses
- B. No 38%, 14 responses
- C. Other (please state specific conditions) 8%, 3 responses

From what types of organizations external to your department do you use or would you consider using personnel as mentors (choose all that apply)?

- Other municipal employees (same body of government) 38%, 14 responses
- Other fire departments 68%, 25 responses
- Other public agencies (social services, health departments, etc.) 43%, 16 responses
- Local schools and universities 11%, 4 responses
- Local businesses 22%, 8 responses
- Local non-profit organizations 5%, 2 responses
- Would not use mentors external to our organization 22%, 8 responses
- Other (please specify) 5%, 2 responses

Which of the following leadership or management skills are addressed in your formal mentoring program (choose all that apply)?

- Career path and development 89%, 31 responses
- Self-advocacy and initiative 66%, 23 responses
- Critical thinking 83%, 29 responses
- Generational differences 34%, 12 responses
- Development of problem solving skills 77%, 27 responses
- Communication skills (interpersonal, written, etc.) 77%, 27 responses
- Conflict resolution 54%, 19 responses
- Interviewing skills 14%, 5 responses
- Resume and portfolio development 14%, 5 responses
- Diversity 49%, 17 responses
MENTORING TO INCREASE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

- Human resources 51%, 18 responses
- Other (please specify) 6%, 2 responses

Company Officer Dev. Skills, Dept. Policy

Which action strategies or methods are included in your formal mentoring program?

- Peer to peer mentoring (one-to-one) 91%, 32 responses
- Reverse mentoring (less experienced mentoring more experienced) 11%, 4 responses
- Group mentoring (one-to-many) 46%, 16 responses
- Individual meetings and feedback sessions 71%, 25 responses
- Shadowing 80%, 28 responses
- Goal setting and action item development 69%, 24 responses
- Resource groups (internal and external) 17%, 6 responses
- Networking 37%, 13 responses
- Opportunities to perform tasks beyond present job 63%, 22 responses
- Incentives for both mentor and learner (financial, merit, etc.) 17%, 6 responses
- Other (please specify) 6%, 2 responses

Crew Resource Management, Acting Officer Program

Respondent information

- Full name and rank
- Fire department
- City/town
- State/province
- Email address
Appendix D

Wilmette Fire Department – Mentoring Program Guideline (DRAFT)

PURPOSE
Provide a framework for mentoring within the WFD, specifically to guide participating personnel in the roles of mentor and mentee as they relate to career development, knowledge transfer, and experiential learning.

SCOPE
This document will guideline applies to all personnel within the WFD in all areas of operation.

POLICY
The WFD strongly encourages the use of mentoring and coaching as a complement to the department’s existing professional development initiatives. While informal mentoring has existed throughout the history of the department to transfer job-related knowledge, the need exists to enhance and accelerate the knowledge transfer process. The International Association of Fire Chiefs stresses the importance of including formal mentoring and experiential learning (learning from both positive and negative experiences) as two primary means of building knowledge and experience within the organization.

REFERENCES
- Officer Development Handbook, International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)
- Best Practices: Mentoring, United States Office of Personnel Management

DEFINITIONS
The definitions below are commonly used terms throughout this guideline and within the acting company officer training program guideline. It is imperative that all personnel understand the terminology used to describe the mentoring and coaching relationship.

**Mentor** – An experienced member of the organization who is assigned to act as an advisor, teacher, and guide to a less experienced member of the organization. A mentor is responsible for providing a mentee with new challenges, supporting the mentee during periods of stress and hardship, and providing feedback on the progress of the partnership. Typically, a new employee mentor will have at least three (3) years of service with the WFD.

**Mentee or Learner** – A less experienced member of the organization, under the guidance of a mentor, tasked with learning specific job requirements and developing skills necessary to succeed within the organization. Occasionally, a mentee can be an experienced member of the department who is under the tutelage of a mentor to learn a new skillset.

**Informal Mentoring** – The natural, unstructured development of relationships over time between personnel that result in knowledge transfer and skills development. This is the
most common type of mentoring used within fire service organizations, and is commonly seen as an older member teaching the newer member specific skills.

**Formal Mentoring Program** - Formal mentoring is more structured, and based upon specific objectives and goals. The mentors and mentees are often paired together based on some type of common interest or compatibility. Growth and progress of the mentee is often measured during regular feedback sessions between the individuals within the mentoring relationship. Typically, formal mentoring relationships last for a specified amount of time and then end, although the mentoring participants may decide to continue their mentoring relationship informally.

**Mentoring Program Coordinator(s)** – Personnel designated by the Fire Chief responsible for coordinating the formal mentoring program. The duties include, but are not limited to (a) identifying program participants, (b) performing needs assessments on participants, (c) assigning mentoring partnerships, and (d) processing all evaluations and feedback forms.

**PROCEDURES**

**Overview**

It is expected that skilled firefighters and officers will utilize their knowledge and experience to mentor and coach lesser experienced members towards developing competency in many tactical, administrative, managerial, and leadership-related subject areas.

The Mentoring Program Coordinator, is responsible for assigning a qualified mentor to all new members of the fire department prior to attending a fire academy. If a new member possesses an **OSFM Basic Firefighter** or **Firefighter II** certification and it is determined by the Fire Chief that the new member is not required to attend a fire academy, he or she will be assigned a mentor at the beginning of the two-week orientation period.

**Mentor Selection Criteria**

Fire department personnel interested in serving as a mentor to a new member shall possess the following minimum qualifications:

- OSFM Advanced Technician Firefighter or OSFM Firefighter III
- Minimum three (3) years of service time
- Illinois Emergency Medical Technician-Paramedic License
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills
- Commit at least one (1) hour per week mentoring and coaching their assigned recruit

Fire department personnel choosing to participate as mentors for acting officer candidates shall possess the following minimum qualifications:

- OSFM Advanced Technician Firefighter or OSFM Firefighter III
- OSFM Fire Officer I
- Possess one (1) of the following:
  - Hold the rank of Lieutenant or higher
  - Successful completion of the Acting Company Officer Training Program
MENTORING TO INCREASE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

- Qualification as an acting company officer for more than two (2) years
  - Commit at least one (1) hour per shift to mentoring and coaching

Fire department personnel choosing to participate as a peer mentor or skills coach shall possess the following minimum qualifications:

- OSFM Advanced Technician Firefighter or OSFM Firefighter III
- Demonstrate knowledge and competency in the subject matter being coached
- Commit at least one (1) hour per week to mentoring and coaching

The mentoring program coordinator shall be responsible for matching a mentor with a mentee. In addition to considering the immediate needs of the mentee, the following criteria will be considered when assigning mentors: (a) complementary skills, (b) preferences of both mentor and mentee, (c) common professional interests, and (d) similar or compatible personalities.

**Mentor Training**

Training for all potential mentors will be conducted during the weekly professional development training sessions. (Scheduled currently for Monday P.M.) Topics will include developing goals and action-items, program expectations, feedback and evaluation, etc. The mentoring program coordinator will be responsible for developing and obtaining appropriate training materials and instructors if needed.

**Mentoring Topics**

Fire department members interested in entering into a mentoring partnership will be given a needs assessment to determine areas in which a member needs guidance and assistance. With the assistance of the mentoring program coordinator, the member will create a professional development outline and general goals. These goals and action-items will be appropriate for the member’s current rank/role within the organization. Some of the areas that may be included within the mentoring program include:

- Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) standards and objectives as they relate to Advanced Technician Firefighter, Fire Officer I, Fire Apparatus Engineer, and other certification programs.
- Department policies and procedures
- Tactical fireground procedures
- Incident Command System (ICS and NIMS)
- Emergency management and disaster preparedness
- Communication skills
- Critical thinking and decision-making
- Aerial and pumping apparatus operations
- Performance appraisals
- Discipline and conflict resolution
- Fiscal responsibilities and budgeting
- Risk management/reduction
- Program management
- Leadership development
Shadowing, role playing, and experiential opportunities provide the most benefit to the mentee during the learning and development process. Mentors shall attempt to create these types of learning opportunities within the identified subject areas in alignment with the member’s goals.

**Feedback and Evaluation**

Members engaged in mentoring partnerships shall receive frequent feedback throughout the mentoring partnership. Mentors will be provided with a feedback/evaluation form to document growth, development, and progress towards established goals.

**New Employee Mentoring**

Fire department personnel assigned to new members will function as a mentor and coach during the two week orientation period, throughout the NIPSTA Fire Academy training, and until the completion of the new member’s probationary period.

**Orientation period (First 2 weeks of employment):**

- Mentors will be responsible for coordinating with department program managers to ensure all pre-academy requirements are met.
- Mentors will ensure the new member has the required personal protective equipment as designated by the NIPSTA Fire Academy.
- Mentors will ensure the new members is apprised of the schedule of administrative and human resources tasks within the fire department and the Village Hall.
- Mentors will introduce basic fire service concepts, SCBA, daily operations, and supporting administrative documents (SOGs, WFD Administrative Manual, VOW Personnel Manual, etc.) to the new member.

**NIPSTA Fire Academy (7 weeks):**

- Mentors will provide contact information for the new member prior to the start of the academy.
- Mentors will contact the new member weekly and provide support, guidance, educational assistance, and monitor academic progress. If the mentor determines the new member is struggling, he will serve as a coach to help the new member gain competency in areas of deficiency.
- Mentors will receive copies of the weekly progress reports sent from the NIPSTA Academy staff for review.

**Probationary Period (2 Years):**

- Mentors will continue to mentor and coach the new member through the completion of the probationary period.
- The new member will receive the *Probationary Employee Task Book* at the completion of the fire academy phase of training. This task book is comprised of operational and administrative policy and procedure review, and shall incorporate training evolutions consistent with the OSFM Advanced Technician Firefighter curriculum.
- Mentors should be periodically meeting with the new member throughout the probationary period to ensure continued progress towards completion of the *Probationary Employee Task Book* and OSFM Advanced Technician Firefighter curriculum.
• In the event that the mentoring partnership becomes strained or is ineffective due to shift or station assignment, an alternate or second mentor may be assigned to assist the new member in completing the probationary employee requirements.

• Mentors will provide regular feedback to shift officers as to the new member’s development. The mentor is encouraged to assist the shift officers in completing the semi-annual probationary reports.

At the close of the new member’s probationary period, the mentoring partnership may be concluded or extended with the agreement of both mentoring partners.

Confidentiality
All information gathered and documents generated within the scope of this program will be kept strictly confidential. This shall include feedback/evaluation forms, needs assessments, and any other related documents used to facilitate mentoring partnerships.

Acting Company Officer Training Program
See Acting Officer Training Program SOG.
Appendix E

Wilmette Fire Department – Acting Officer Training Program Guideline (DRAFT)

PURPOSE
This guideline was developed to provide a standardized training experience for all eligible personnel desiring to participate in the department’s Acting Company Officer Program. Experiential learning and mentoring shall be the primary function of this program with the intention of preparing personnel to successfully act in place of and transition to the company officer role.

SCOPE
It is the intent of the WFD to provide the necessary training to all eligible personnel choosing to participate in the Acting Company Officer Program. The minimum requirements to participate in this program are outlined within the Procedures section of this document.

PROCEDURES

Eligibility
Personnel designated to act as a company officer are listed here: Acting Officer Candidates List.

This list will be updated after each promotional process and ratification of a new eligibility list and upon additional personnel completing the qualifications and training required to act as a company officer.

1st Priority
Those on the current promotional list will share the majority of the opportunities to act. If an exchange or overtime takes place where someone on the promotional shift is working, he or she would take priority over an individual that is slated to act if he or she is not on the promotional list. Rotation of eligible candidates shall be at the discretion of the Duty Chief. The intention is that the top three candidates in 1st priority would generally serve 70% of the acting opportunities. It is also the intention that the duration of the acting company officer assignment will be for a 24 hour period, and all acting opportunities would not cause unnecessary overtime.

2nd Priority
Those members who have submitted letters of interest and are qualified shall share in the minority opportunities to act. Rotation of eligible candidates shall be at the discretion of the Duty Chief.

3rd Priority
Those members who have not submitted letters to act or expressed interest in not participating but meet the qualifications.

Collective Bargaining Agreement
The following excerpt is from the current collective bargaining agreement outlining the agreed upon acting officer compensation and eligibility guidelines:
**Acting Officer’s Pay.** Any time a member of the Union is requested to act in place of a sworn Lieutenant, the member shall be compensated for two (2) hours of pay at time and one half (1-1/2) of his regular rate of pay. If a member of the Union shares the duty of acting in the place of a sworn Lieutenant during the same 24-hour shift, then the acting officer’s pay benefit described in the Section shall be pro-rated by the number of hours worked by each employee as an acting Lieutenant, provided that the pro rata amount shall not be less than one hour of pay at time and one-half.

In order to act as a Lieutenant the member must:

- Be on the current promotional list, or;
- Have ten (10) years of service on the Wilmette Fire Department, or;
- Have five (5) years of service on the Wilmette Fire Department and one (1) of the following:
  - Has passed the written test for Lieutenant,
  - Holds F.O. I (provisional) Certification or greater,
  - Holds an Associate of Science Degree in Fire Science.

The member on the Lieutenants’ Promotional List shall have first priority to act in the place of a sworn Lieutenant.

**Program Overview**

When a shift vacancy occurs in a company officer position and at least two sworn officers are on duty, the vacancy shall be filled by a qualified acting company officer. Personnel choosing to act in place of a company officer must complete and demonstrate competency in all requirements outlined within this training program.

Members presently on the Lieutenant Promotional List who have acted as a company officer for more than two (2) years may, at the discretion of his/her Duty Chief, continue to perform the role of acting officer without completing the required training program. Any member who has not previously performed the role of acting company officer or is a new addition to the promotional list, must complete this training program prior to being allowed in the acting company officer role.

**Mentor Selection Criteria**

To assist the acting officer candidate in completing the Task Book, he/she will be assigned at least one mentor. Typically, a shift officer will serve as the candidate’s mentor and evaluator, however if an experienced, qualified acting company officer expresses interest in mentoring a candidate, he/she may be assigned as a co-mentor with the shift officer. Mentors will possess all requirements as outlined within the [Mentoring Program Standard Operating Guideline](#).

Personnel assigned as mentors are responsible for reviewing all daily progress reports, the *WFD Acting Company Officer Task Book*, and any other assigned documents. Feedback sessions should be conducted during each shift and after any significant activities or incidents where the acting officer candidates demonstrated leadership, management, or supervisory skills.
Mentor Training
Training for all personnel participating in the department’s mentoring program will receive training as outlined within the [Mentoring Program Standard Operating Guideline](#).

Training Program
A specific set of competencies and tasks have been identified as critical to satisfactory performance as an acting company officer. These items are denoted below:

- Completion of all tasks, competencies and scenarios in the *WFD Acting Company Officer Task Book*.
- Completion of a minimum of ten (10) shifts riding in the front right seat of a fire apparatus while a mentor rides in the apparatus jump seat.
- Completion of a minimum of ten (10) daily progress evaluations documenting incident response, training given/received, demonstration of leadership and management skills and responses to challenges/stress. These will be observations made during shadowing of the candidate in the front right seat.

Upon successful completion of the criteria outlined above, the acting officer candidate will be designated a [Qualified Acting Company Officer](#) and will be eligible to fill any vacancies requiring an acting company officer.

Evaluation and Feedback
Regular feedback and written evaluations are vital to the success of the acting officer candidate. After experiential learning opportunities are presented to the candidate, a mentor should give constructive and honest feedback on what was observed. This feedback, combined with continuous exposure to “learning moments” will promote growth and development in both the candidate and mentor. Daily evaluations will be completed after each shift where the candidate is shadowed by the mentor. These evaluations will be completed by the candidate and reviewed with the mentor.