

Mentoring: Building on Success

Lesson Objective:

Lesson Objective: Comprehend the benefits of a mentoring program in the unit.

Desired Learning Outcomes:

1. Define Mentoring.
2. Identify ways a unit mentor program can help new members succeed.
3. Describe how to build a mentoring program in your unit.
4. Discuss how to select good mentors within your unit.
5. Describe how to properly train, match, & monitor mentors in your unit.
6. Explain how a mentoring program can enhance membership retention.

Lesson:

Mentoring Defined:

Mentoring is not new. It is as old as the days of apprenticeship to artisans hundreds of years ago. Mentoring begins with the process of matching an experienced member with an inexperienced member. Mentors act as a trusted guide and advisor to allow the new member to gain supervised practical experience. Mentors should be trusted counselors, competent tutors, and able to coach new members toward success.

Ways a Mentoring Program Helps New Members Succeed:

A unit's success depends on the knowledge and skills of all its members. It takes a long time for new members to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to become a productive member of the unit. This can be a frustrating experience for new members because of the complexity of Civil Air Patrol to newcomers.

A mentoring program provides a way for you as unit commander to provide new members with the guidance they especially need early on. This is also a very practical approach to improving membership retention for the unit. New members can become lost in all the acronyms, the regulations, and sometimes the military style of doing things in CAP. This is often referred to as the *cloud of confusion*. Mentoring is one of the tools you can use as unit commander to help get your new members through this ominous cloud.

Why Promote a Unit Mentoring Program?

- CAP membership is complex to outsiders
- CAP is unique from other organizations
- Gets more experience paired with less
- Provides direction and focus to new members
- It provides a more positive experience for all
- Mentoring programs enhance unit retention

Bringing in new people to any group can disrupt the dynamics of the group sometimes in a negative way. Mentoring is a person to person method of addressing this very human dynamic and getting new members into the fold quickly. Mentoring requires a very personal touch that makes people feel special.

Mentoring is also the best way to get new members started right on learning the skills that help the unit. Your unit's performance will increase substantially when new members get on board with the program quickly. They learn what is expected of them quicker and gain personal confidence as you recognize their immediate contributions to the unit.

Ways Mentoring Helps New Members:

- Buffers the initial "Culture Shock"
- Gets them started on the right track
- Provides needed direction and focus
- Bust through the cloud of confusion
- Provides them with confidence.
- Makes them feel valued
- Enhances moral and esprit de corps

Mentoring is important because you do not have the time as commander to provide this critical personal attention to every new member. By training and assigning mentors to new members, you help them succeed if they are inclined to do so.

Your task is to create and nurture a unit mentor program. This section will help you learn how to do just that.

How to Build a Simple Unit Mentoring Program:

This segment will provide you with a simple unit mentoring program. It is up to you as unit commander to make any mentor program work. If you follow the simple steps shown in this lesson, you can establish your program and then expand or modify the program later to suit the needs of your unit.

There are four basic steps to any unit mentor program:

- A. Identify available mentors in your unit
- B. Train and prepare your mentors to succeed
- C. Match mentors with new members carefully
- D. Monitor the program and make adjustments as required

See helpful and important official CAP guidance in CAPP 50-7, *MENTORING: Building Our Members* and CAPP 50-8, *Organizational Excellence Mentor's Guide*.

Selecting Good Mentors:

Identifying and finding good mentors is no easy task. Good mentors are special people with experience, wisdom, and an outgoing personality that relates to others. This lesson will describe characteristics common to good mentors. You will also see that mentors must be good role models in every aspect of their life. Mentors are the ones who are naturally inclined to greet new members and make them feel welcome. Selection of mentors is the first and most critical step in a successful unit mentoring program.

Members who have demonstrated past success often make good mentors, but unless they have the temperament of a teacher, and the wisdom of an advisor, they might not succeed as a mentor. It is imperative that the mentors you choose be people persons. First impressions often set the tone, and your mentors must present themselves as experienced, wise and willing to help new members.

Select Those Possessing The Following Qualities:

- Vast experience
- Great wisdom and Judgment
- Outgoing Personality
- Respected by Others
- Demonstrated Success
- Friendly
- Temperament to Teach
- Willing to Mentor

Train, Match, & Monitor Mentors:

Even when you make the best choice of mentors, they are quite often only as good as the training and preparation they receive. As unit commander, you must take the time and effort to make sure your unit mentors are prepared for what is ahead.

Expectations have to be out on the table right away. Mentors must understand the teacher and advisor role they are about to assume. Make certain that each mentor knows how to seek answers for questions they might not know. Emphasize the type of role model the mentor must provide. Commanders and mentors should review CAPP 50-7 and CAPP 50-8 thoroughly to make certain they are aware of precisely what mentoring means and what tools are available. (For cadet mentors see CAPP 52-6)

Mentoring is a very person to person relationship. Make certain you match each mentor to each new member very carefully. The mentor and mentee should have common interests if possible. Help the mentor get to know the new member by sharing what information you can about the new member. The choice of mentor can be the difference between success and failure for the new CAP member.

Be sensitive to age and cultural differences. The mentor should be aware of cultural differences they may have with the new member. This makes it much easier to avoid cultural mine fields. The goal is to achieve mutual respect and an effective working relationship between the two.

Train your Mentors to Succeed

- Review CAPP 50-7 and CAPP 50-8 in detail with your mentors
- Review your own expectations of the Mentor and Mentee
- Ask and receive commitments of service to the unit and new members
- Reward Unit Mentors with public recognition and praise

Match Mentors to Member's Needs

- Involve the new member in the choice of Mentor
- Mentor and mentee should review each other's expectations.
- Be sensitive to specific cultural needs of mentor and mentee
- Be prepared to adjust/change Mentor/member if necessary
- Follow up with inquiries about how is it going between the two

After mentor and mentee are paired, you need to monitor the effectiveness of the dual effort. As unit commander, you should be concerned about how the program is working and be ready to make adjustments whenever necessary. This means you must have mentors report to you on a regular basis. You must make time to check with the member to assess the mentor relationship. It is imperative that you identify dissatisfaction or discontent early and act quickly to remedy any miscommunication as quickly as you can. The mentor/mentee relationship may be fragile at first, and like any other human relationship, it may need some nurturing on your part.

Monitor the Program Regularly

- Tune in your awareness for problems or discontent
- Periodically review feedback and adjust as required
- Watch for signs of “lopsided” mentoring (CAPP 50-8).
- Listen. Listen. Listen.... and hear what is happening.

A Mentoring Program Can Enhance Membership Retention:

Membership retention should be of critical concern to any unit commander. Recruitment of good members is hard enough; keeping those good recruits can be even harder. Unit commanders should include a mentor program in the membership retention tool box. Mentoring does not resolve all issues with retention, but it is a very useful part of any retention program.

Here are six ways mentoring can help unit member retention:

- A. Helps clear the confusion cloud
- B. Improves personal relationships among unit members
- C. Give new members more opportunities
- D. Gives new members more direct access to command
- E. Turns the not so motivated into the motivated
- F. Enables new members to succeed with their interests

The “Confusion Cloud” seems to surround every new member. They are in a new environment, with new people, new terminology, and their own pre-conceptions of what to expect. Some visitors never return because the confusion cloud was just too heavy and too scary for them. Mentors can help clear that cloud away.

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At the unit level, personal relationships are vital to unit success. Life time friendships are often developed in groups such as CAP. Every friendship begins with an introduction. Your mentor can act as that bridge between existing members and new members. Sometimes existing members form groups that are not that welcoming to a new face. Mentors can assist with the process of helping new people become part of the group.

Visitors come to CAP because of an interest that they believe they have in common with CAP. Mentors can help new members find opportunities to explore that interest to help the squadron and promote the new member's participation with the unit.

As a unit commander, you do not have time to run the unit and give each new member your undivided attention. With a mentoring program, you can help new members along by making regular contact and showing interest in their progress. Establishing this communication link to your new members is vital for the growth of your unit.

A highly motivated new member's enthusiasm can wane quickly as they work their way through the training maze. A mentoring program can help new members sustain that motivation. The mentor can help the new member navigate the maze with the least amount of friction.

The new member wants a chance to contribute in a meaningful way to the efforts of the unit. As the new member becomes committed to the causes of this great volunteer organization, it is imperative that CAP helps them be successful. Mentoring is one of the best tools for enabling any new member to succeed.

Try it, you will like it.