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## On Functioning of the Mentoring Institution in the Penitentiary System: the View of Employees

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### Abstract

*Introduction:* the article attempts to update a number of problematic issues related to the functioning of the mentoring institution in facilities and bodies executing criminal penalties. In the context of educational work carried out with the staff of the penitentiary department, the goals and objectives of mentoring activities are determined. Attention is focused on regulatory and social components of the mentoring process and the variety of functions performed. It is stated that mentoring is an important and effective tool that contributes to the optimal adaptation process of young professionals to the conditions of modern penitentiary activities. *Purpose:* to identify problematic areas of activity of the mentoring institution in the penitentiary system at the present stage and to determine the effectiveness of the work carried out by means of a comprehensive assessment of mentor-mentee relationships. *Methods:* a method of literary sources analysis, a psychological communicative method, and a survey. The survey covered 542 people divided into two focus groups. *Results:* when implementing mentoring activities, it is important to combine organizational, legal, social, psychological and pedagogical factors. It is established that discipline, sociability, legal erudition, and willingness to teach are of paramount importance for mentors. It is revealed that practice-focused lessons, monitoring of the execution of service duties, regular individual conversations are the most effective forms of mentoring. It is determined that the effectiveness of the mentor-mentee relationship depends on a rational model of official behavior based on a practice-oriented approach to a young employee. Some ways of increasing the role of the mentoring institution in the penal system are proposed. *Conclusion:* it is stated that in modern realities,

the mentoring institution plays an important role in solving problems related to the personnel and organizational aspects of professional activity in the penal system. It is determined that the integration of administrative, social, psychological, pedagogical and methodological components in the implementation of mentoring activities makes it possible to form an effective mentor-mentee interaction model. This will significantly increase capacities of educational work with staff, based on key principles of supporting professional continuity and strengthening service traditions.

**Key words:** penal system employee, educational work, mentoring institution, mentor, mentee, professional activity, professional development.

#### 5.8.1. General pedagogy, history of pedagogy and education.

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### Introduction

Nowadays, the improvement of the quality of training specialists working in institutions and bodies executing criminal penalties is one of the vectors to develop the penitentiary system of the Russian Federation [1]. The current work in this area assumes coordinated actions of officials in ensuring a differentiated approach to various categories of employees. Annually, a significant number of young employees begin their service in the penitentiary system, with whom a fairly extensive range of various activities is carried out, including those related to state-political (socio-political), spiritual, moral and patriotic education [2]. In this regard, an important role is assigned to the training of penitentiary specialists, which is a purposeful process aimed at the systematic acquisition of professional competencies necessary for the effective performance of tasks assigned to the penitentiary system. This activity is defined by the order of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia of June 13, 2023 “On approval of the procedure for organizing personnel training to fill positions in the penal system of the Russian Federation” and focused on maintaining a highly professional staff capable of solving the tasks the Federal Penitentiary Service faces. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to consider organizational, social and psychological problems, particularly, the mentoring institution [3], defined as an important, practice-oriented element of an integrated training system in the penal system at the stage of vocational training and education [4]. A number of research-

ers believe that the active use of the mentoring system helps achieve staff consistency. At the same time, the mentoring system should have a certain degree of attractiveness for mentors, as well as the ability to give an objective assessment of mentee’s achievements [5].

Mentoring in institutions and bodies of the penal system is carried out in accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Federal Law No. 197-FZ of July 19, 2018 “On service in the penal system of the Russian Federation”, orders of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia No. 948 of December 30, 2022 “On approval of the Concept of educational work with employees of the penal system of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030”, No. 535 of July 17, 2024 “On approval of the Procedure for organizing personnel work, including educational work, in institutions and bodies of the penal system of the Russian Federation”, No. 851 of December 5, 2024 “On approval of the Procedure for organizing individual training of an employee of the penal system of the Russian Federation who has been transferred to a higher, equivalent or lower position in the penal system of the Russian Federation corresponding to a different functional purpose or activity area”, No. 5 of January 13, 2025 “On approval of the Procedure for organizing individual training of an employee of the penal system of the Russian Federation, studying his/her personal and business qualities and the Procedure for evaluating results of the individual training of an employee of the penal system of the Russian Federation who has passed the test”, as well as

other local regulations of institutions and bodies of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia.

Mentoring is an important and integral part of educational work in the penal systems defined by the order of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation No. 535 of June 17, 2024 as a complex of information and propaganda, individual psychological, legal, socio-economic, moral and ethical, cultural and leisure, sports, mass and other activities aimed at preserving and strengthening traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, as well as preventing violations of official discipline. Mentoring is one of the most important activities of work with employees of penitentiary institutions and bodies. This underlines the importance of the existing regulatory framework in the context of the issue under consideration [6].

The institution of mentoring assumes the transfer of knowledge and skills from more qualified persons to less qualified ones, as well as the provision of assistance in their professional formation understood as “a process of directed and regular development and self-development of the individual, identification of his/her place in the world of professions, his/her realization in the profession and self-actualization of persons capacities and skills [7]. It is also necessary to focus on the social component of mentoring, since this type of activity is characterized by a number of social functions, each of which has a certain instrumental characteristic (integrative, reproducing, regulatory, communicative, humanistic, cultural, socio-political, socializing) [8].

Thus, at the current stage of the penitentiary system development, mentoring is one of the important and effective tools for adapting young professionals to prison conditions and performing official duties in strict accordance with current legislation, as well as preserving and developing professional traditions in their work.

#### *The empirical part*

To study effectiveness of the mentoring institution, as well as to determine its significance and relevance at the current stage of the penitentiary system development, we conducted an empirical study at the Tomsk Institute for Advanced Training of Employees of the Federal Penitentiary Service in the period from Septem-

ber 2023 to October 2024. The survey covered 542 people employees undergoing training (vocational education, professional retraining, and advanced training) at the institute.

The theoretical basis of the research was the method of analyzing regulatory and literary sources. It helped get a complete and detailed picture of the current situation in this area

As for the empirical part of the study, we developed a questionnaire with 21 closed and open-ended questions structured in 2 blocks. The first block is devoted to socio-demographic and professional data of the interviewed respondents, while the second one – employees' opinions, views and ideas about the organization and implementation of mentoring activities in the institutions and bodies of the penal system.

It was suggested that the effectiveness of individual training of young employees depended on the functioning of a specific model in the “mentor – mentee” relationship dyad. Its significant components are social (joining a new social group), professional (mentors' expertise), moral and psychological aspects (emotional state of participants in the educational process, ethical responsibility for the result of work, and formation of a positive professional behavior model).

To conduct the survey and further process the results, the respondents were divided into two focus groups based on their existing professional experience in the penitentiary system.

Focus group 1 – penal system employees undergoing training under the educational program “Vocational training for citizens first recruited to the penal system” (persons with up to one year of service in the penal system) – 248 people.

Focus Group 2 – penal system employees with at least 1 year of service experience. This group includes employees of security departments of correctional facilities, regime departments of pre-trial detention facilities, operational departments of correctional facilities and pre-trial detention facilities, heads of squads of correctional facilities, employees of psychological laboratories of correctional facilities and pre-trial detention facilities, employees of personnel departments of institutions and bodies of the penal system, employees of security and convoy departments – 294 people.

The study of a personality traditionally begins with socio-demographic characteristics. Using these indicators in relation to one group (subgroup) helps create an average portrait of a personality. Due to developments in psychology and pedagogy, characteristics of employees of different genders, ages, educational levels, etc. can be used in professional activities when setting and solving specific official tasks.

The analysis of the study sample indicates a relatively equal proportion of female (46%) and male employees (54%) in the target group of people with up to one year of service in the penal system (Focus Group 1). In Focus Group 2, male employees (71.4%) comprise a significant majority of the group; the proportion of women is 28.6%.

All Focus Group 1 members are in the under-45 age group. The majority of them are young people aged 18–25 (46.8%), aged 25–30 (24.2%), aged 30–35 (19.3%), 35–40 (4.8%), and 40–45 years (4.8%).

As for Focus Group 2, the differentiation of respondents by age is as follows: from 18 to 25 years – 6.1%; from 25 to 30 years – 13.9%; from 30 to 35 years – 37.1%; from 35 to 40 years – 25.9%; from 40 to 45 years – 16.3%; over 45 years – 7.5%.

The respondents of Focus Group 1 have higher (41.9% of the respondents), secondary specialized (30.6%), secondary vocational (23.4%), and secondary education (4.1%). Higher education has an overwhelming number of employees representing Focus Group 2 (89.1%). This is followed by employees with secondary specialized (8.8%) and secondary vocational education (5.1%).

The service experience of Focus Group 1 representatives is up to 1 year. In Focus Group 2, the variability of service experience is as follows: 2% – persons with service experience up to 1 year made up; 17.7% – from 1 year to 5 years; 24.8% – from 5 to 10 years; 27.6% – from 10 to 15 years; 18.4% – from 15 to 20 years; 9.2% – over 20 years.

Thus, the analysis of socio-demographic data allowed us to make an approximate portrait of the mentee. This is a young person (man or woman) who took service in the penitentiary system at the age of 30 and, in most cases, has higher education. The portrait of the mentor is as follows: a man aged 25–45, having higher

education and service experience of 10 to 20 years.

The Concept for the Development of the Penal System up to 2030 requires penal system employees to know normative legal acts of the state penitentiary policy. Therefore, the mentor and the mentee should closely interact in matters of the analysis and generalization of regulatory legal acts related to execution of sentences.

It is important to acquaint the mentee with other employees of the institution. According to the respondents of both focus groups, their mentor introduced them on their first day of work to employees of the department (37%) and to other colleagues to work with on a regular basis (29.2%). Thirteen percent of the respondents of Focus Group 1 and nine percent of the respondents of Focus Group 2 were not introduced by their mentor.

There is no doubt that the formation of knowledge, views, beliefs, values, legal attitudes and feelings towards the existing penitentiary reality requires constant contact between various departments and services of the correctional institution that ensure compliance with the order and conditions of serving sentences, as well as the effective use of means of correction of convicts.

A fundamental role in professional activity is played by the mentor's ability to give correct answers to the questions of the mentee and to apply regulatory legal acts.

According to 63% of the respondents in Focus Group 1 and 50.4% of the respondents in Focus Group 2, their mentors gave complete answers to their questions.

About a half of the respondents (48.3%) in Focus Group 1 emphasized that the mentor had given feedback on the results of the work every time after completing the task, clarifying the correctness and inaccuracy of certain actions in the areas of professional activity.

In Focus Group 2 this indicator amounted to 58.6%. A fairly large number of the respondents in both focus groups, 29% and 21%, respectively, indicated that the results of their work had been summarized once a week, regardless of the end of the assignment.

The results show that it is extremely important for the mentor to take into account individual psychological characteristics of mentees, whose activities are rather contradictory

in nature. They, on the one hand, imply correction and re-socialization of convicts and, on the other, control over their behavior, fulfillment of their duties, restrictions and prohibitions, and the threat to their own safety.

We emphasize that the initiative of communication equally came from both the mentor and the mentee (50% to 50%, depending on the initiator of communication). In this context, this figure was 53.2% in Focus Group 1 and 51.7% in Focus Group 2.

Practical research shows that creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding in a team is achieved through communication [9]. Managers who listen to opinions and views of their subordinates on a particular situation have a clearly structured professional activity. In this regard, the mentors' productivity increases and they pay more attention to the mentees.

According to the respondents of Focus Group 1, the results of mentoring are manifested in the effective fulfillment of specific assignments by the mentee (30.6%) and in the formation of the mentees independence (30.6%). In turn, the respondents of Focus Group 2 (35%) mostly note the mentors' positive motivation to serve. The mentor should observe the "golden mean", on the one hand, choosing effective legal ways and methods of motivating mentees and, on the other hand, creating conditions for self-development of the mentee.

The vast majority of the employees in Focus Group 1 (92%) have no experience as a mentor; 56.8% of the respondents in Focus Group 2 have such experience. This is due to the fact that Focus Group 1 includes employees with up to 1 year of service experience.

The next significant indicator characterizing the effectiveness of the mentoring institution is the mentors' training level [10]. The respondents were asked to indicate a list of professional skills that, in their opinion, the mentor should possess. It should be noted that the classical mentoring model implies that the mentor is not part of the administrative hierarchy built above the mentee. This is, first of all, "an older comrade with greater knowledge and experience" [11]. Young employees (Focus Group 1) identified the following priorities: extensive practical experience, professionalism in their field (37.1% of the respondents consider this skill to be paramount in their mentor), pronounced

organizational qualities (methodic approach, ability to plan clearly, discipline, and punctuality) (24.8%), competence, which consists in the knowledge regulatory framework (21%), and responsibility (13.1%). Such qualities as mutual assistance, prudence, and decency were considered insignificant (1.1% each).

A slightly different picture is observed among the respondents of Focus Group 2. They identified the following significant qualities contributing to the successful and effective implementation of mentoring activities: extensive practical experience, professionalism in their field (42.5% of the respondents noted it as the most significant), sociability (27.9% of the respondents ranged it first), knowledge of regulatory documents regulating official activity (25.2%), and responsibility (22.7%). Qualities, such as self-development (1.4% of the respondents ranked it last), the ability to optimize their work (1%), software proficiency, psychological skills, and maintaining a neat appearance (0.7% each) were considered not particularly important. So, there are certain differences in views between young and experienced employees regarding significant qualities that the mentor should possess. However, both sides are generally unanimous in the opinion that the defining quality that will definitely contribute to the successful implementation of mentoring activities is the high level of qualification of the employee responsible for this type of work.

As for qualities that the respondents of Focus Group 1 (30.6%) find important for the mentee, they are of volitional and motivational character (determination, perseverance, desire to work, and interest in further professional activity). Besides, 19.3% of the young employees believe that they should also strive to gain new knowledge in the penitentiary sphere and take the initiative in this matter. Communication qualities (openness in contacts, ability to work and communicate in a team, and friendliness) ranked third (14.5%). Young employees mention areas related to education, literacy, erudition, and the opportunity to work in a well-coordinated team and discuss current issues and find the most effective ways to solve them. According to young employees, the least important qualities of the mentee are self-control, courage (determination), initiative, self-development, and honesty (each of these qualities scored less than 3%).



A similar pattern is observed when analyzing the responses of participants of Focus Group 2. The first place is occupied by qualities related to the volitional and motivational sphere (determination, learning ability, desire to work, hard work, perseverance, motivation, and interest in the results of their activities); 32% of the respondents indicated this. Communication skills are in second place (23.8%). Responsibility (current employees understand it as the willingness to perform functional duties in the best possible way, taking into account the consequences that a person's decisions or actions may entail and the ability to make decisions in difficult situations not only for themselves, but also for their colleagues) gained 18.3%. At the same time, qualities such as emotional intelligence, striving for career growth, determination, and patriotism are least relevant for mentoring (the total figure was 5.1%). We can say that employees who act as mentors in institutions and bodies of the penitentiary system, in one way or another, analyze the compliance of mentees with those qualities that should be part of the adaptation process in line with their professional activities [12].

One of the questions in the questionnaire concerned the type of information that the mentor needs to convey to his/her mentee. As is known, the availability of objective information in the process of penitentiary activity allows employees to get a complete picture of the current operational situation in the institution, as well as its competent assessment, which, in turn, contributes to a faster professional adaptation of a young employee to service conditions [13]. Focus Group 1 respondents consider knowledge of laws, other regulatory legal acts, and documents regulating official activities in institutions and bodies executing criminal penalties as the most significant information (25.8% of the respondents). It is followed by obtaining information about the specifics of their service in general, as well as functional responsibilities of their position (16.1%). It is also important for them to understand the basics and specifics of the department (work schedule) in which they serve, information regarding the structuring of work and working hours (14.5%). The least significant information, according to the respondents of Group 1, is related to actions (algorithm development) in case of emergency, extreme

situations, existing customs and traditions in the service team, as well as information revealing the ethics of official behavior and corporate etiquette in a professional group (the relevance of obtaining this information was only 1.6%).

As for current employees with extensive service experience, they primarily believe that the mentor needs knowledge that will help clarify all the nuances related to activities of the specific structural unit (21.7% of the respondents in Focus Group 2 put this indicator in the first place). It was followed by the information related to legal documents defining modern penal policy (20.6%) and functional responsibilities of a young employee (16.5%). We would like to draw attention to the fact that employees who are ready to act as mentors should pay attention to the specifics of interaction with convicts and persons in custody (11.8%), including giving examples from their practical activities, as well as introducing young employees to colleagues (for example, exchange contact information) – 10.8%. Information related to ethics of official conduct, as well as general cultural development, is the least relevant for mentors (only 3.4% of the respondents indicated its importance).

The problem area related to determining the most effective forms of work with mentees deserves attention. Young employees identified practical exercises with imitation of performance of official tasks, as well as execution of official assignments in the field of activity (24.2%) as priorities. The second place in terms of importance was taken by mentors' conversations with mentees (17.7%). Young employees emphasize the necessity of receiving information about the operational situation in the institution as a whole and the situation in a particular department, in particular, prompt consultations on various current issues arising in their professional activities, and individual assistance (12.9%). The respondents of Focus Group 1 attributed the use of audio and video methods during mentoring, as well as the organization of leisure activities off-duty, to the least effective forms of work (these forms scored less than 2%).

A different situation is observed in Focus Group 2. For example, the staff considers it important to talk with their mentees and clarify the specifics of service in this penitentiary in-

stitution and responsibilities of their position (this factor is the most significant and relevant for 29.3% of the respondents). Solving practical tasks by a young employee also seems to be an important form of the mentor-mentee work (23.1%). What is more, the representatives of this focus group pay attention to the mentors' behavior patterns and the experience of the most qualified employees, as well as veterans of the penal system (16.3%). As for ineffective forms of work, the respondents of Focus Group 2 also attributed to them the use of audio and video methods in working with a sponsor, as well as various activities aimed at improving the cultural and educational level of young employees during off-duty hours (2.8%).

In conclusion, the surveyed were asked to work out recommendations that could have a positive effect on mentoring activities. Unfortunately, 82.9% of the respondents of Focus Group 1 and 69.4% of Focus Group 2 ignored this question. Nevertheless, the rest proposed some ways to enhance the role of the mentoring institution, which can be presented by the following groups:

- material and financial component (elaboration of the issue related to additional payment for mentoring activities, financial incentives, and rewards for specific achievements). More than 70% of the respondents paid attention to the importance of this component;
- time factor (allocation of time for mentoring to work directly with the mentee, exercising constant control over the mentee, constant contact with him/her, preventing the reduction of the established mentoring period in case the young employee has any problems during the service);
- psychological aspect associated with taking into account individual psychological characteristics of the mentees' personality, with the subsequent development of an algorithm for individual work with him/her (including in close contact with the psychological service);
- assessment of the social and professional concept of professional activity related to the appointment of the most experienced and responsible employees as mentors, formation of a corporate culture in the mentor-mentee relationship system, conducting skill lessons, training sessions for mentors to share experiences and solve pressing problems in this area.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis of the data obtained allows us to conclude that the institution of mentoring is highly effective in solving a number of organizational and personnel problems, such as a lack of professional knowledge and experience, difficulties in the social and service sphere, presence of adaptation obstacles in a particular service unit, insufficient motivation, and a lack of strong reliance on established professional traditions.

It is found out that when carrying out mentoring activities, one should take into account a complex of organizational, legal, social, psychological and pedagogical components. They include the assessment of individual psychological characteristics of mentors and mentees, the mentors' training level and the tools available to disseminate professional experience and knowledge, as well as the search and implementation of new methods of their translation into professional activities, and determination of the motivation level.

In the process of carrying out individual work, it is important to build and further maintain constant communication. It is determined that a special role in this area of interaction belongs to the mentor, who is obliged to competently interpret to the young employee the concepts and norms of legislative acts in the field of the execution of criminal penalties, explain nuances and give practical examples of the performance of official tasks in penitentiary practice, answer mentees' questions, and provide other relevant information with regard to the current operational security situation. It is important to support the initiative of the young employee helping him/her to form and develop necessary professional qualities, such as single-mindedness and goal-orientation, diligence, determination, perseverance, and striving for success.

It is stated that in the context of increasing the role of the mentoring institution in the penal system, it is advisable to take into account a combination of diverse, but at the same time interrelated elements (administrative decisions in terms of both material and non-material incentives for mentors, building an effective model of interaction with interested service units during individual training, organization and implementation of appropriate methodological work in this area).

Based on the empirical data obtained, it seems advisable to develop methodological practice-oriented recommendations. They will help the mentor to determine the most effective ways of work with the mentee with regard to the specifics of service conditions and capacities of the young employee. The results of the study show that mentoring is a two-way process in which it is important to comply

with the fundamental condition that the mentor is ready, has the opportunity and creates the necessary environment for the dissemination of his/her professional experience, and the mentee has all the necessary conditions to learn from this experience. This will contribute to the fastest professional development of a young specialist in the field of penitentiary activities.

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