

Developing Leaders in the Federal Courts: Twenty Years of the Federal Judicial Center's Leadership Development Program for Probation and Pretrial Services Officers

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If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

—John Quincy Adams

NOW IN ITS 20th year, the Federal Judicial Center's Leadership Development Program (LDP/the Program) has helped to promote leadership skills in over 800 U.S. federal probation and pretrial services officers, specialists, and supervisors from almost all of the 94 judicial districts. As of 2012, fully 53 percent of the current chief U.S. probation and pretrial services officers are LDP graduates. Many other graduates have been promoted as well. As seen in Figure 1, the program completion rate is 82 percent. The leadership skills participants have developed and the projects they have completed have resulted in cost savings and innovation within their districts. Ultimately, the program has assisted the federal judiciary in developing a capable cadre of leaders to help deal with the daunting challenges in the years ahead, which was the expressed goal of the program as articulated by the Judicial Conference in 1992.

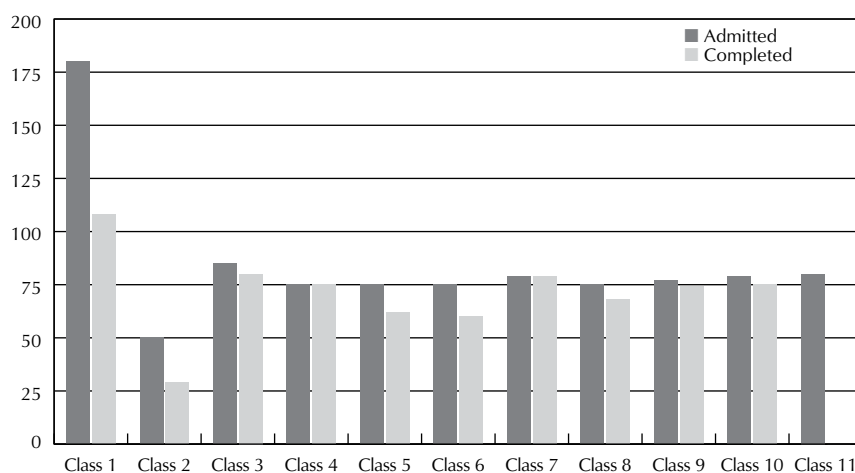
This article describes the history of the program, analyzes its major components, describes its unique blending of academic and experiential approaches to development and leadership skills, and assesses the impact of the three-year program on the participants and on the federal court system overall (Siegel & Quickel, 2009).

A Call to Action

In 1992, the Committee on Criminal Law of the Judicial Conference (the main decision-making body for the U.S. Courts) raised concerns about several issues. The first was an anticipated vacuum in capable and prepared leaders in federal probation and pretrial services, since a significant number of chiefs were approaching mandatory retirement age (57 years old). The second concern arose from changes that had taken place in federal probation and pretrial services offices stemming from Congressional statutes, Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AO) guidelines, and new automation applications.

Finally, the Committee expressed concern about the wide variation among the probation and pretrial services officers in implementing the changes (Siegel & Quickel, 2009). To address the issues, the Federal Judicial Center (the Center) designed the Leadership Development Program to promote a new generation of leaders aware of the changes in the system and equipped to meet new challenges. The need for this leadership development has been more recently articulated in the Judicial Conference's strategic plan for the judiciary. The 2010 Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary states: "To ensure a sufficient internal supply of qualified candidates, the

FIGURE 1.
Admitted vs. Completed



judiciary should initiate a meaningful leadership development training program along with the creation of executive relocation programs to widen the pool of qualified internal applicants” (Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary, 2010).

This call to action is what inspired the Center to begin the program 20 years ago, and it continues to animate the program managers and Center staff. As new changes occur within the system, the program must adapt and promote new leadership development techniques to continue its mission to improve leadership skills within the U.S. Courts.

Designing the Leadership Development Program

When establishing the program, Center staff took into account the concerns of the Judicial Conference’s Committee on Criminal Law. In response to the Conference’s suggestions, the Center envisioned the following goals for a leadership development program:

- To develop a personal approach to leadership and management;
- To develop new skills in the area of change management;
- To develop an ability to benchmark the achievements of federal probation and pretrial services officers;
- To broaden participants’ understanding about judicial administration; and
- To learn from the best practices of other probation and pretrial services officers across the country (Siegel & Quickel, 2009).

With these goals in mind, the Center undertook a study of leadership development programs in both the public and private sectors to determine which program components would most benefit federal probation and pretrial services officers. The study showed that the leadership development programs that achieved the greatest success were those that offered learning opportunities over an extended period of time. Another study conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership confirmed that a broad range of leadership challenges, including completing a temporary work assignment outside of the person’s area of expertise, contribute to the building and seasoning of effective managers (Siegel & Vernon, 1994). To be most valuable, the program must also incorporate actual challenges from within the U.S. Courts System.

The Center staff designed a three-year development program to improve leadership within the U.S. Courts system grounded in

the actual needs of the system, sensitive to but not driven by current leadership literature, and responsible to the decision-makers and funders of the federal probation and pretrial services system (Siegel & Quickel, 2009). The Leadership Development Program was created to challenge participants with a rigorous and dynamic program that includes multiple projects, leadership literature, and in-person leadership training. The Center appointed faculty members (college professors, consultants, leadership experts) to provide ongoing mentorship and feedback to participants throughout the program (Siegel & Quickel, 2009).

Who is Eligible for the Program?

After considerable debate, the design committee at the Center settled on the following criteria for admission to the Leadership Development Program. Candidates would have to be one of the following:

- Currently a deputy chief probation or pretrial services officer;
- Currently a CL 29, step 25 supervisory probation or pretrial services officer;
- Currently a CL 28, step 25 nonsupervisory probation or pretrial services officer (may include officer-in-charge, specialist, and other job titles at this level);
- Currently a CL 28, step 25 probation or pretrial services officer with at least 3 years of experience in the federal system at that level; or
- Currently a CL 29, step 25 systems manager, financial manager, or human resource manager in probation or pretrial services.

One other issue caused considerable discussion: the role of the chief probation/pretrial services officer in the nomination/selection process. After vigorous debate, the Center decided to give chiefs the option of supporting or simply acknowledging the participation of one of their officers in the program. Chiefs are not involved in the selection process; Center staff review applications and score each section according to an extensive grading rubric with specific requirements for scores.

Leadership Development Program Content

As previously stated, the program consists of multiple projects, leadership literature, and in-person leadership training. Specifically, this entails the Management Practice Report, the In-District Project, and the Temporary Duty Assignment.

Management Practice Report

The Management Practice Report is the first project participants must complete and it provides a beneficial transition into leadership activities. This project requires participants to read leadership literature, conduct interviews with at least three leaders in the public and private sectors, and complete a report summarizing their findings on the impact that leaders have on their organizations.

In-District Project

About halfway through the program, participants must complete an In-District Project. This project requires participants to take an issue or challenge in their district, analyze its root causes, propose a solution, and implement that solution with the input of the chief and the faculty advisor. This project allows participants to practically apply the skills they learned from the Management Practice Report and confront the struggles that face a leader. Participants’ projects have generally been clustered in these five areas:

1. Education and Training Programs
2. Technology Implementation/Improvement
3. District Policies and Procedures
4. Evidence-Based Practices/Studies and Performance Management Assessments
5. Safety/Wellness Programs

To create a project that will benefit their district, many participants create needs assessment surveys, interview other district employees, and review policies (Siegel and Quickel, 2009). A former LDP participant commented that “the In-District Project began as a task but became a passion.” This project has become a way for participants to elicit change within their district and to make a lasting impact on the court system.

Some recent examples of the projects from the eleventh class include:

- “Community Outreach” developed by Brian Driver in the Northern District of Illinois. Due to the economic recession, Driver hopes to raise awareness of how the mission and vision of the probation office benefits taxpayers. He will use the public school system to raise awareness among the student population.
- “A Pretrial Orientation Program for Defendants and Families” developed by Stephen R. Pridgen in the Northern District of Florida. This program will guide defendants and families through the pretrial phase, providing information about the process leading up to the sentencing,

about the Bureau of Prisons, and about a number of opportunities that are now offered through the BOP to help individuals prepare for release back into society, including the Reentry program. Additional information will include local resources for counseling and financial management for the individual families.

- “Designing Measurement Tools to Monitor Staff’s Work Processes and Products” developed by Ken Reid in the Northern District of Ohio. Reid will design measurement tools to ensure that all staff members are performing at an appropriate level and to measure how the district is incorporating evidence-based practices.

Through the implementation of the projects, participants have learned that “not all change is created equal” and that some innovations may look better on paper than they do when applied to a real situation. They have also learned the importance of persuasion and the need for buy-in from colleagues and managers in their districts.

Temporary Duty Assignment

In the last phase of the program, participants are asked to work briefly in another field, with the options including other judicial districts, other governmental branches and agencies, or private corporations. During this time, participants must observe new management techniques and leadership strategies, contribute to short-term projects, and interview relevant leaders and staff. This assignment gives participants the tools they need to become better leaders and managers in their own districts. Examples of past temporary duty assignments include the Delmarva Shorebirds Baseball Club, Catholic Charities of Omaha, the Executive Office of the President—Office of National Drug Control Policy, the Sacramento Intelligence Unit, and many others.

Conclusion

Since the inception of its inaugural class in 1992, the Leadership Development Program has been effective in achieving many of its objectives over its 10 completed classes (Siegel, 2005). To help understand the trends of these successes, we need to paint a portrait of the participants of the program. Of the 804 participants (approximate), 483 have been male and 321 female (Higgins, 2012). This breakdown is important, because it shows the increasing participation of women in a field where leadership positions have traditionally been dominated by white males.

Numbers alone cannot tell the story of the Leadership Development Program’s success. Past participants can speak to the lasting implications of the program for their professional and private lives and the court institution overall. LDP participants from class 11 are still in the program, but already have positive things to say. One participant said, “I’m so proud to be in this program. Each project/paper has enabled me to grow in ways I would not have anticipated.” Another participant remarked, “It is a fabulous program and everyone should be required to complete it. It provokes thoughts and makes individuals seek others’ opinions when working in offices with multiple personalities and styles. The program teaches you to be open-minded, to think more clearly, and to be a positive leader.” Retired Chief U.S. Probation Officer and Colonel Michael Herman recently returned from active duty and noted that he “utilized that three-year program in hostile, stressful, and combat related arenas and it has saved many lives and accomplished many wonderful things.”

The successes of the Leadership Development Program can be seen both quantitatively and qualitatively in the statistics and responses of participants (Siegel and Quickel, 2009). One of the major benefits of the program is that through the projects and

seminars, the probation and pretrial services system has learned *how* to learn. In this way, graduates of the program are on their way to becoming “reflective practitioners” (Schon, 1987). Some of this learning will promote increased efficiencies, and some will actually result in dollar savings (Siegel and Quickel, 2009). The program breeds new leaders in an ever-changing system and promotes a profession of “reflective practitioners.” These are people who accomplish their work responsibilities, but also take the time to reflect on their work and the ways in which they can improve (Schon, 1987).

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