



Criminalistics Section - 2016

B205 Embracing Change: The Challenges and Rewards of Transitioning From the Bench to Management

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the challenges facing managers in forensic science laboratories and the differences in knowledge, skills, and abilities required by managers versus those needed by scientists. This presentation will also offer some recommendations to prepare for this type of career change and to improve the transition process.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a realistic view of the challenges faced by managers in forensic science and will provide an approach for laboratory systems to proactively address potential knowledge and skills gaps for their employees new to management and for those considering such a transition.

Most forensic science laboratories select their first-line supervisors and laboratory directors from personnel who have worked in their system — people who are good forensic scientists. One challenge with this model is that most bench scientists, having studied forensic science, chemistry, biology, etc., haven't had formal training in business, leadership, conflict resolution, or management. Although technical knowledge, skills, and abilities are an important foundation for forensic science laboratory leadership, these talents only represent a fraction of what is necessary to be an effective leader. Forensic science laboratory managers must also have the ability to communicate effectively in order to share workplace objectives and address personnel issues with subordinates as well as the ability to influence superiors in the organization regarding needs such as training, equipment, and personnel resources. Knowledge of the procurement process, how to effectively develop and defend budgets, how to motivate employees and address performance problems as well as myriad human resources and legal issues are all critically important for supervisors at all levels. Unfortunately, many forensic scientists are not provided opportunities to develop these skills prior to being considered for management positions. Of even greater concern, some new supervisors are not provided adequate support and training even after obtaining a managerial position.

Many of these challenges may be further exacerbated when a former peer is promoted from within to a supervisory position. Personnel issues can be more difficult to handle when a former peer is involved and the nature of pre-existing relationships have changed. Dealing with conflict resolution, performance evaluations, or poor performance can be problematic for seasoned leaders and even more so for new supervisors that were recently part of the peer group.

Other challenges include the constant need to do more with less and the increasing public scrutiny of forensic science. Infrequent, but highly publicized, cases of inadequate science or malfeasance on the part of forensic scientists have put all of forensic science in a defensive posture. This presentation will focus on some of the unexpected issues that a technical manager may encounter and how to prepare for them. It will also highlight some of the hidden benefits of providing leadership in today's forensic science laboratory.

Forensic Science, Management, Career