

Cardinal Health created an intentional mentoring process, building on the informal mentoring it had relied on before.

All About Mentoring

BY SUSAN MOSS

Cardinal Health operates in a dynamic and complex environment. The multitude of changes in the healthcare industry requires a knowledgeable, aligned, agile, and collaborative workforce capable of building quality relationships across the enterprise to achieve personal and organizational objectives.



Our mentoring and sponsorship initiatives are priority focus areas within our global talent management strategy because we believe that a well-designed and executed mentoring process can help us achieve business goals.

The opportunity


Mentoring has long been an integral part of Cardinal Health's culture. We had some formal pockets of mentoring, but most of the mentoring in the organization happened at an informal level. Our challenge was to create a framework that would enable us to fully leverage our culture of mentoring by expanding access to a greater employee population, enhancing the overall experience, and achieving real benefit at the individual and organizational levels. The framework had to be robust enough to meet our objectives and simple enough that it wouldn't be a burden for participants to use.

The solution

We designed and implemented an infrastructure to support our organization's talent development needs and measured the short- and long-term return on investment of our mentoring initiative. We partnered with a software supplier, MentorcliQ, to help us meet our goals while providing software that was easy to use, resources that support participants' mentoring efforts, and expanded reporting capability.

We have multiple programs strategically aligned to achieve our goals, in three categories: career development, business and functional units, and diversity and inclusion. Within the career development pillar is the Learning Circles mentoring program. We have nearly 40 learning circles, each comprising five or six individuals participating in enterprise-wide

leadership development programs. These leaders—ranging from vice presidents to new managers—connect monthly as cross-functional peer mentoring teams to offer information about their respective programs, share advice on issues they're facing, broaden their business acumen, and build a more global network.



ENGAGEMENT IN FORMAL MENTORING PROGRAMS HAS GROWN FROM FEWER THAN 50 INDIVIDUALS TO MORE THAN 700.

Within the business and functional pillar, we have a sales mentoring program; in the diversity and inclusion pillar is our women's mentoring program. Additionally, we have an open mentoring program that is accessible to any employee across the organization.

Our framework provides just enough structure to compare apples to apples across programs, and sufficient freedom so each program can align to meet the needs and objectives of its stakeholders. All programs share commonly defined basics such as minimal participant requirements; training; and core competencies such as partnership agreements, midcycle check-ins, wrap-up/closure evaluations, and reporting. Each program administrator has the freedom to tailor other operational program aspects such as duration of matches, match configurations, additional milestones, selection of mentors, and supplemental training.

The main elements of the practice include:

- mentoring software, which provides the platform for matching

participants, assessing progress, and reporting outcomes

- training and support resources for program administrators and participants
- operating procedures that define practice implementation and management, including exceptions
- governance that outlines roles, responsibilities, and accountabilitys of administrators, participants, and stakeholders
- communication strategy, which defines key messages, activity timelines, target audiences, and communication formats
- guidelines for program administrators and participants.

Despite customization, each mentoring participant interacts with the program in the following ways.

- **Enrollment.** During program enrollment (which takes less than five minutes), each participant creates a professional profile, states mentoring preferences, and can complete a short personality survey. The system uses this information to find a quality mentoring match.
- **Mentoring relationships.** After being paired with a highly compatible mentoring partner, interactions proceed via company email; participants do not need to log onto software.
- **Tracking.** Participants are polled periodically using email-based surveys, where they can report on mentoring activities and progress.

The process

We used a three-pronged approach to develop our process. First, we revisited our organizational and talent management objectives to ensure our strategy was aligned with business drivers. Not only would this be

important for determining our mentoring plan; it also would help us determine what outcome measures were needed.

We spent more than six months gathering feedback on the current state of mentoring through meetings, surveys, and focus groups with organizational stakeholders. We held a summit meeting of key stakeholders to share our findings and solicit input.

The result of this day-long event was a theoretical program framework and list of required supplier capabilities that shaped the second prong of our plan: the development of a mentoring strategy. This draft strategy was shared with our senior executives for approval. Upon approval, we then met with several suppliers to find the right partner to bring it all to life. Another six months was spent piloting a single program with our selected supplier so we could evaluate program metrics, the third prong of our approach.

Results and lessons learned

We gauge our progress based on participation, activity, and impact. In less than two years, engagement in formal mentoring programs has grown from fewer than 50 individuals to more than 700. We have a diverse demographic of participants at all levels, business segments, and functions, and from many of the company's geographic regions. Our participants have invested more than 3,000 hours in

their development through mentoring this year. Satisfaction ratings indicate that more than 95 percent of participants are very pleased with program training, resources, and support. Also, 95 percent are very pleased with their mentor or mentee relationships.

We're proud of the results achieved to date. For the first time, we can share both quantitative and qualitative outcomes that influence employee engagement, retention, development, and career movement. We currently have 12 mentoring programs on our platform and are on target to have 15 in place in our next fiscal year.

Some of the decisions and actions we took at the outset served us well. Others we learned when things didn't pan out as we had anticipated. Here's what we did right:

First, we got buy-in from the very beginning of the project. We recognized that without the commitment of stakeholders across the organization, the mentoring plan could be viewed easily as a "corporate-only" effort and minimize the potential positive impact we could make. We earned agreement on the core elements of our strategy, including definition of terms, milestones, metrics, and our supplier partner.

Next, we started small. We began with a single program so we could learn what would and wouldn't work and quickly adapt to improve outcomes. We deliberately did not do a broad-based mentoring marketing

campaign until we were a year into the program. We wanted to build a mentor pipeline before creating more demand than we could meet.

Finally, we partnered with a supplier that cares about us and our organization. A supplier partner who delivers the technology that meets your users' needs and delivers great service is integral to your success.

Here's what we've learned along the way:

- **The demand for mentors always will exceed your supply.** Use every available forum you can to recruit, and refresh your recruitment strategy with innovative ways to recognize and reward your top mentors.
- **Keep structure to a minimum.** Use only what is needed to provide the guidance needed to achieve individual and organizational objectives.
- **Avoid using the term "formal mentoring."** For many people in our organization, it has negative connotations. They tend to assume that a "formal" program means there is a complex structure that might constrain their mentoring efforts. Instead, we've started using the term "intentional mentoring" to convey our process.

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