

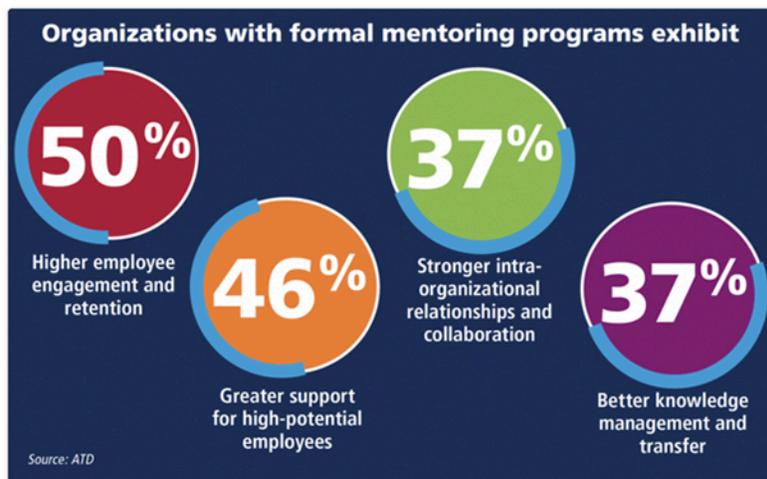
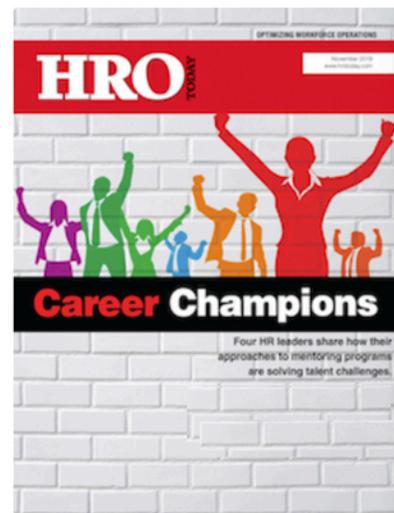
Career Champions

By Marta Chmielowicz

Mentoring for Career Growth

Today's employees are happier, more productive, and more engaged when their jobs bring intrinsic rewards, or the feeling of doing meaningful work that propels their personal and professional growth. In this environment, career development is no longer a perk reserved for certain high-ranking positions—it is an expectation. In fact, according to LinkedIn's 2018 Workforce Learning Report, a whopping 93 percent of employees would stay at a company longer if it invested in their careers.

Mentorship programs are one great way to make an impact. They can bridge the gap between individual and organizational needs, providing connection and development opportunities to both the mentor and mentee; improving job satisfaction and retention; and solving talent challenges along the way. Moreover, they signal to employees that the employer values its people and is interested in their success—not just on the job, but throughout their careers.



How The FDA Drives Higher Job Satisfaction

Organizations that are able to foster these connections effectively see a number of benefits. According to Levis Francis, managing analyst and leader of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s mentoring program, mentoring drives personal and professional growth, increased engagement, higher job satisfaction, and a better sense of the workings and culture of the organization.

According to Francis, the support system that this creates can help new employees more easily transition into their roles and feel more connected to the organization. "When they have a mentor, employees know that they have someone in their corner that they can rely on if they have any questions," she adds. "We sometimes undervalue how important it is to be able to connect with other people but mentoring truly allows people to do this."

The goal of FDA's mentorship program is to bridge the gap between experienced and new employees, to transfer knowledge, and to enhance engagement and job satisfaction. "We have three programs in total: a general population program used agency-wide; a pathways and recent graduates program for students and graduates coming into the agency; and an executive mentoring program where new executives can receive required mentoring from other senior leaders," Francis says.

And the results have been impactful. At the recent closing ceremony of the FDA's mentoring program, one participant shared that prior to his mentoring partnership, he felt very alone, having moved to the area with no friends or family. However, his mentor turned all of that around. By connecting him with new people, sharing information about various organizations and events in and out of work, and even inviting him to Thanksgiving dinner with his family, his mentor was able to build his social circle and help him feel more connected to the agency.

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Diversity by Design

Culture is only the beginning. Mentorship allows employees to share their strengths and experiences with their colleagues across service lines or geographies, improving inclusion within an organization. Mentoring programs facilitate the integration of culture and people,” says Francis. “By connecting with each other, we allow for the exchange of ideas, knowledge, customs, and culture. It allows us to celebrate the diversity that we all bring to the table and use our strengths to support the growth and advancement of an organization.”

5 Building Blocks

A successful mentoring program needs to be tailored to the specific needs and objectives of the organization while also taking into account individual employees and where they are in their personal and professional journeys. How can HR leaders facilitate a positive experience? Here are five best practices.

1

Set Expectations

One of the most important things that you can do when establishing a mentoring program is defining the objectives and goals of the program,” says Francis. “It is extremely important to understand the organization’s goals, the purpose for developing the program, and the audience for which the program is intended. Having an understanding of the needs of the population that you are serving can support HR leaders in facilitating the right match and achieving positive results.” Organizations should identify whether they are trying to develop lateral skills or leadership skills—and whether the talent development aligns with succession planning, business expansion, or growth in a new vertical. This information will help HR leaders set selection criteria and performance expectations.

2

Make Smart Matches

Mentor partnerships work best when both parties’ goals are compatible and when they have skills that complement each other. Armanino evaluates these factors during the application process, asking questions like:

- *What are you looking to achieve within your professional growth?*
- *Why do you want to be involved with the program?*
- *Where have you found success around developing others?*

This feedback is then used to match mentees with mentors from a different service line, location, or business unit, creating a unique experience that fosters a more diverse point of view.

3

Leverage Technology

The FDA leverages technology to support, engage, and evaluate the agency’s **2,000 mentoring relationships**. According to Francis, the **MentorcliQ** platform “provides a matching algorithm which we have found most helpful during the matching process. More importantly, their success coaches help us to strategically plan how we will approach mentoring within our organization and work with us step-by-step to execute our plan and tailor the software to meet our needs.”

The platform enables the organization to track program performance, including participant investment, the amount of hours spent mentoring, and real-time program and relationship satisfaction. This feedback is supplemented by monthly, mid-cycle, and program closure surveys designed to evaluate program function, design, and participant satisfaction. Since launching the program, the agency’s employees have logged over **14,000 mentoring hours with a satisfaction rating of 4.6 out of five**.

4

Monitor Progress

Once a mentoring partnership is in place, HR professionals need to set formal expectations of mentoring frequency and monitor the success of the relationship. Organizations should seek out feedback from both the mentor and mentee in the halfway point of the mentorship engagement to ensure that meetings are frequent and both parties are growing from the experience.

5

Encourage Participation

Mentoring benefits an organization and aids in the personal and professional development of the mentee, but mentors themselves have much to gain as well. According to a 2017 ATD study, a remarkable 75 percent of executives say mentoring has been critical to their career development.

ATD reports that mentors receive three key benefits from participating in a program:

1. Development of new perspectives
2. Development of leadership skills
3. Insight into the organization