

TRAINING FORUM

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Best PRACTICES IN TRAINING

Automated Mentoring Program Saves Time, Thousands of Dollars

Human resources professionals at Covance used to spend “hundreds and hundreds of hours of administrative time” manually matching mentees and mentors. “They had 6-hour powwows to match people across sites and business units,” said Michael Kauer.

By shifting to an automated mentoring system in 2009, Covance (www.covance.com), an international drug development company, achieved annual savings of \$113,000 (\$377 per participant).

Kauer discussed the program’s success during a recent webinar, “Building a Better Mentoring Program with a Click: A Case Study Discussion with Covance,” hosted by Nobscot.

How the Old Process Worked

Previously, employees interested in participating in the company’s mentoring program would fill out an application form each June and e-mail it to a central mailbox. The information would be copied and pasted into a spreadsheet, and by August, the HR team would have completed the arduous task of manually matching mentees with mentors, said Kauer.

In 2009, about 400 employees requested a mentor, and about 300 matches were ultimately made.

Participants attended a mandatory 8-hour, classroom-based orientation program, and received an 80-page glossy guide containing “tons of information” about mentors’ and mentees’ roles.

“On many different levels, it was becoming very difficult to maintain and administer that program,” says Kauer, who leads a group of internal Covance consultants who are responsible for the performance management process globally.

During his first year with the company, Kauer participated in the mentoring program as a mentor. “I didn’t want to make changes until I understood how it worked.”

Kauer surveyed most employees who had participated in the program during the previous 5 years to determine “what worked and what didn’t.”

For example, he asked employees to what extent they used the 80-page guides after orientation. “No one actually really looked at it after the classroom session ended.” That alone created an opportunity for cost savings.

He also looked to technology to increase the efficiency of the program, reasoning that “there had to be a better way of administering and operating something like this through technology” and that automation would give senior HR professionals more time to spend on strategic HR matters.

How Efficiency Was Boosted

With Mentor Scout, an automated mentoring system, potential mentees can complete an online profile within minutes and search instantaneously for a mentor, Kauer says. “You can find a mentor within seconds rather than months.”

Mentors do not have to complete their own profiles annually anymore. In addition, participants now attend a 90-minute orientation session online, mentoring resources and tools are provided online, Covance no longer distributes the 80-page guide, and participants report being pleased with their matches, says Kauer.

While the previous program cost \$147,200 annually (\$491 per participant) to administer and operate, technology has helped reduce Covance’s costs to \$34,240 annually (\$114 per participant).

What is Kauer’s biggest advice when moving toward a technology solution for a mentoring program? Borrowing Nike’s slogan, he says, “Just do it.” The “relatively minimal cost” is worth the time and effort saved in streamlining the process. He also recommends making sure the system is easy to use; otherwise, employees might be discouraged from participating.