



## Featured Article

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# Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Make Me a Mentor Match

Covance Inc. is among the companies using software to help employees and mentors connect. The program Mentor Scout enables pairings based on mutual professional interests.

Single people use social software to search for the perfect soul mate. If Covance Inc. could find a similar tool, Michael Kauer figured the company would be able to improve employee-mentor matches.

It turned out to be more than a romantic notion for Kauer, the senior manager of organizational development for Princeton, N.J.-based Covance, a drug developer. Covance supplies research and services to help pharmaceutical-makers bring new drugs to market.

In 2010, Kauer's team spearheaded Covance's transition to automated mentor-matching, using a software program known as Mentor Scout. The software, licensed from Honolulu-based Nobscot Corp., enables employees and mentors to connect based on mutual professional interests, Kauer says.

Mentor Scout also streamlines many of the processes typically used to connect mentors and those seeking to be mentored. . "It used to take a couple of months before you knew who your mentor was. Now, you can find a mentor within seconds," Kauer says.

Mentoring remains a hot topic for many organizations, driven by a need to develop future talent, transfer institutional knowledge and reduce costs. For some organizations, an effective mentoring program spells the difference when recruiting topnotch candidates. "People in their mid-20s and early 30s are almost demanding to be mentored," says Laura DiFlorio, director of sales for Nobscot.

Mentor-matching software is not widely embraced by talent-management vendors, probably because they "have not yet learned there is a real desire," says Beth Carvin, CEO and president of Nobscot.

Covance employs about 10,000 people in more than 60 countries. A growing number of the company's employees want mentors, Kauer says. The company launched in-house mentoring in 2005 with 34 participants, but demand has steadily increased. Nearly 500 employees requested a mentor in 2011, with 300 partnerships eventually approved

Automating the system eliminates hundreds of hours of administrative work for Covance's human-resources professionals and frees them up to address strategic issues.

Previously, before using the online system, mentors and their protégés were required to complete an eight-hour, in-person orientation. The same information now is given during 90-minute webinars, eliminating the need for costly travel and classrooms. As a result, the company saves about \$113,000 a year. "Now that we've gone down the path of automation, I can't imagine ever going back to the old way of doing things," Kauer says.

Covance employees must meet three main criteria to receive mentoring. They must have worked at Covance for a specified period of time, achieved at least a "meets performance" rating, and have a well-defined objective in mind. Managers also must give their approval before an employee is able to participate.

The program is not used to correct deficiencies or performance issues, Kauer says. "We want folks who have demonstrated a willingness to perform and grow."

Jonathan Horton found a mentor when adjusting to his new job as Covance's compliance manager for the Americas. Horton is now managing individuals who not long ago were his peers. "That's a transition that doesn't necessarily come easily," Horton says.

Connecting with the right mentor was instrumental during the various stages of building a new team, such as creating cultural norms for the group and setting performance expectations. Horton's mentor helped him learn which type of activities would promote participation and bring people together. "Having him walk me through the different phases was very beneficial," Horton says.

Horton also represents the "pay it forward" attitude among many of Covance's mentored employees. In addition to being mentored, Horton also has served as a mentor to other employees. "There is a personal satisfaction to seeing my mentees succeed," he says.

The Mentor Scout software enables mentoring relationships to get established quickly, Horton says.

"The greatest benefit is that the program puts the matching process in the hands of potential mentors and mentees."

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