

Speed Mentoring, Flash Mentoring, and Mentoring Circles

– an interview with **Julie Haeger**,
Director of Talent Management, Edwards Lifesciences

Julie Haeger has been part of the HR team at Edwards Lifesciences for a dozen years. She has spent the last two in Talent Management, where she and her team of five within the larger Global Talent Management and Learning group focus on “big, chunky global programs” like performance management, employee engagement, high potential development, diversity and inclusion, talent analytics, and – importantly – mentoring.

Haeger’s team has two overarching goals: managing impactful programs like mentorship to help employees thrive and succeed, and doing it in a way that is scalable across the company’s base of more than 14,000 employees. “Beyond serving our existing employees, Edwards is in a sustained growth mode,” she said. “We have to be efficient so that we can implement and expand these programs in step with the company’s growth.”

According to Haeger, Edwards has been a longtime champion of mentorship and has organized traditional mentoring programs within its global business units and/or functions for years. “These are one-on-one mentoring arrangements within intact groups, meaning everyone involved is in the same work group, like global supply chain, HR, or quality,” she explained. Each group has a set of senior leaders who volunteer as mentors, with participation open to either all employees in that group, or to a select group of employees whose development needs can be achieved with mentoring.

To match mentors and mentees, Edwards uses [Chronus](#), a fee-based mentoring software, and then adjusts the results manually. “For these intact programs, we allow the software system to do algorithmic matching, which it does very well,” said Haeger. “Then we take a look at the matched pairs with our human eyes, and say, ‘Does this make sense? Should this person be paired with that person, or does it make more sense to switch it around?’”

After the matches are finalized and each pair is assigned, the program leader from HR facilitates a brief orientation meeting, provides participants with guidelines on how to be a mentor and how to be a protégé, troubleshoots as necessary, and solicits feedback to help drive future improvements.

New Mentorship Approaches

With an eye towards reaching more employees, Edwards has been expanding its mentoring efforts by piloting newer forms of mentoring, including speed mentoring, flash mentoring, and mentoring circles. Haeger reports that, while the programs are still relatively new, all three have been received

enthusiastically by employees. A description of each model and Haeger's thoughts on each one are summarized below.

Speed Mentoring

"While traditional mentoring programs usually have a duration of six months or a year, speed mentoring is typically a two-hour event in which employees are able to explore career topics of interest through a series of short, focused conversations with multiple, more senior individuals," explained Haeger. "The way it works is that mentors stay stationary, while the protégés rotate to speak with a different mentor every ten minutes. At the start of each round, the protégé asks the mentor a question, and the conversation moves forward from there."

To plan this type of event, a program leader in HR reaches out to 20-40 people within a work group who are divided equally between those seeking input (protégés) and those willing to share their advice and experiences (mentors). They advertise the event within the unit, invite participants, and secure a location, usually a café or conference room.

To make sure this short amount of time is effective in terms of learning and sharing, all participants are prepared in advance. "Because the participants often don't know each other, the first minute is usually a quick personal introduction. After that, we want them to be able to dive right in," Haeger said.

Accordingly, mentors receive instructions that describe the type of questions they might be asked so they can think about them advance. "We also ask them to think about what stories from their career or experience they might want share," she added. Protégés get a sample list of questions so they can decide what topics or lines of questions resonate for them personally – for example, seeking guidance on career pathways within the organization, getting advice about company culture or navigating a matrixed environment, or asking an open-ended question like what is the best piece of career advice you ever received and why was it valuable?

"Then, of course, they can flex and ask a different question depending on who they are talking to, because they might want to get different things from different mentors as they make the rounds," Haeger said.

Another essential part of the preparation is deciding on and communicating the objective of the event in advance. "People are busy, so they need to understand what they are going to get out of it before they commit two hours of their time," noted Haeger. For protégés, the objective can be general, like career guidance or enrichment, or something more focused like an area of diversity and inclusion. For the mentors, most often the impetus is that they like to give back, "especially in small ways that fit their schedules," she said.

Advantages of speed mentoring include that it is both less expensive and less complicated to organize than traditional mentoring. "It's pretty cost-efficient because you don't need a matching system," said Haeger. "All you need is a room, a little bit of food because that makes it more fun, and people's

time to organize and participate.” After the event, the facilitator sends out a brief survey to gather feedback, “No more than two or three questions to see if the event was of value,” she concluded.

Flash Mentoring

“As the name suggests, this is a very short, one-and-done kind of mentoring,” Haeger explained. “The idea is to make senior leaders available to qualified employees for a one-hour call or meeting on a specific topic.” This approach differs from speed mentoring in that the protégé and mentor have more time and can dig deeper into the topic of interest, still without committing to a long-term relationship involved in traditional mentoring.

To implement flash mentoring at Edwards, Haeger’s team first reached out to all the graduates of the company’s leadership programs and asked them to participate. Those who agreed were then asked to set up mentoring profiles in Chronus in which they listed topics in which they had relevant and valuable expertise such as specific leadership strengths, functional expertise like marketing, engineering or finance, or career experience, like an international assignment. “Once that was done, employees could go into the program, look at the profiles, and then send a message to request an hour of a specific person’s time, either in person or via a phone call. The mentor could then accept or decline the request,” Haeger detailed.

The Chronus software also provided some helpful limits. “I set up my profile to accept only two appointments per month so that I can manage my time,” said Haeger.

As a mentor herself, Haeger has found the flash sessions to be a positive experience. “I had about 10 flash mentoring sessions in the last year, and they were really fun,” she recalled. “They’re easy and quick, and nearly all of them are focused on career development. So I don’t have to prepare much – I just go and answer their questions and share whatever I can over a cup of coffee.”

While Edwards uses Chronus to run this program, Haeger suggested that it could also be implemented more informally by making profiles available on a Microsoft Teams website or Excel spreadsheet, having executives set clear limits on how much time they are able to commit, and deciding on the appropriate employee audience for the program.

Mentoring Circles

Over the last year, Haeger’s team also began piloting mentoring circles. “The impetus was a company-wide survey of women that uncovered a tremendous demand for mentoring that wasn’t being met by our existing programs,” Haeger recalled. “In order to act on that feedback, we decided to explore mentoring circles.” In contrast to the one-on-one mentorship models mentioned previously, mentoring circles are a form of small group mentoring in which participants get together regularly to collectively explore or discuss an issue of common interest by sharing personal stories, or discussing articles or videos.

On the [Lean In website](#), Haeger’s team found [complete instructions for starting and running mentoring circles](#). “There’s a whole section that basically gives you everything you need to set up your own program,” she explained. “Using this as a guide, we decided to pilot this with the goal of ultimately making it available to all the women at Edwards who have joined Edwards Network of

Women (E.NOW), our employee resource group for women. That's about 1,800 women across the globe.”

Based on the Lean In guidelines, Haeger's team decided to create circles of ten women; two leaders and eight members. “We also decided to run the program through Chronus, which added a per-user licensing cost but allowed the HR team to track who was involved and provided a central repository for documents, articles, and links that the groups might share,” she said. For the pilot year, each mentoring circle was assigned the same topic – presentation skills. “But another way to do this is to let the circle choose whatever topic resonates with them.” To recruit participants, her team advertised the program internally and asked women to apply to join a circle.

Ultimately, 13 mentoring circles were launched. After running them for a year, Haeger received almost universally positive feedback. “There were two groups that reported that the circles felt more like training than mentoring, so something went awry there; maybe the leaders took it on themselves to be more like trainers,” she said. “This is pitfall is worth noting – in fact we offer training classes on presentation skills, so if that's what you want you can simply take that class. This, instead, is supposed to be peer mentoring on the soft skills needed for a strong presence when presenting where everyone gets the opportunity to share their successes, failures, and learnings.”

To achieve optimal results, Haeger recommends that each circle have mature leaders, who understand that they are responsible for facilitating the circle in a way that ensures that everyone has a chance to speak and no one is dominating the conversation.

Looking Ahead

While the increased focus on mentoring has been well-received at Edwards, Haeger added a final word of caution. “With all of these mentoring programs, some of our employees are getting pinged or invited to participate more than once and they're getting confused about the variety of programs,” she said. “We have to make sure we are really organized so that we're not over-involving some people and under-involving others.”

That said, Edwards has found its investment in mentoring to be incredibly valuable and plans to continue offering creative and relevant programs to its growing workforce to deepen engagement and enrich careers around the world.

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