



EFFECTIVE MENTORING WITH CANCER RESEARCH UK

Creating Positive Impacts on Engagement and Career Development



INTRODUCTION

Mentoring programmes are a proven strategy for enhancing employee development, boosting performance, and improving retention.

Cancer Research UK (CRUK) partnered with professional coaching company The OCM to support a mentoring programme called Synergy, aimed at enhancing career development opportunities for its employees. Denyse Waugh, Learning and Development Specialist at CRUK, shared the vision and impact of Synergy during a webinar hosted by The OCM.

ABOUT CANCER RESEARCH UK

Cancer Research UK celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2022 and is dedicated to beating cancer through pioneering research and public engagement. With over 4,000 employees, the charity has invested more than £5.4 billion in life-saving research since its inception, contributing to a 16% reduction in cancer death rates and increased survival rates over the past two decades. Looking ahead, CRUK plans to invest an additional £1.5 billion in research over the next five years.

DRIVERS BEHIND THE MENTORING

Launched in 2021, CRUK's Synergy mentoring programme was created to support employee career development by matching employees with knowledgeable, passionate, and well-trained mentors across the organisation.

While CRUK's HR strategy focuses on "Beating Cancer by Attracting, Developing, and Engaging our people," a 2021 internal survey revealed that only 50% of employees felt they could fulfil their career aspirations at CRUK, contributing to high staff turnover.

To address these challenges, CRUK set ambitious goals: reducing turnover by 5% and increasing employee engagement by 10%.

The mentoring scheme was seen as a key strategy to achieve these objectives, providing employees with the support they needed to realise their full potential.

The programme had an original vision to streamline HR operations by consolidating ad-hoc mentoring requests into a structured, self-service model using their internal learning management system, FUSE.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS FOR MENTORS

Following approval from senior management, CRUK's mentoring recruitment programme was set up to run annually, requiring a 12-month commitment from mentors. Each mentor takes on two cohorts of mentees, each lasting six months.

CRUK uses a simple form process to collect information about mentors' skills, experience and caregiving status - as CRUK's mentees are often looking to work with someone who understands the challenges of balancing a career along with the pressures of parenthood or caring for a loved one. This information is then used to match mentors with mentees who understand their unique challenges.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE OCM

Once the recruitment process was complete, CRUK partnered with The OCM, who specialise in coaching and mentoring programmes, to deliver a bespoke, structured training programme for mentors.

The training, led by OCM Consultant Coaches Monica Mundo and Jenny Whitfield, focused on helping mentors develop key mentoring skills and setting a framework for successful and consistent mentoring relationships across the organisation.

Jenny Whitfield said, "We are particularly proud to partner with CRUK to provide the training aspect of the programme. We designed a specific structure with three workshops aimed at equipping mentors with the right skills before they start their mentoring conversations, then a further session once they had started mentoring to address any challenges and support them with conversations they were having and hone their skills."

The OCM's first 'Skills Development Workshop' focuses on building core mentoring skills, such as active listening, asking open-ended questions, and giving constructive feedback. This workshop prepares mentors to hold meaningful conversations from the outset. The second, 'Understanding Good Mentoring' workshop, helps mentors define their purpose, explore the roles they may need to play, and understand the mindset required to guide mentees effectively. They also learn how to manage boundaries and tackle potential challenges in a mentoring relationship.

The final workshop provides mentors with a safe space to reflect on their experiences, share learnings, and practise mentoring skills. This workshop also covers how to bring the mentoring relationship to a positive and natural conclusion.

Jenny explained, "We offer a structured framework for these conversations, guiding mentors on how to start discussions,



set goals, and navigate the relationship effectively. We also equip mentors to manage complex aspects, such as gracefully bringing the relationship to an end." Following the training, mentors were carefully matched with mentees, often pairing individuals who might not typically interact to ensure diverse perspectives and learning opportunities.

Denyse Waugh added, "While many companies offer mentoring opportunities, not all invest in the necessary training. By investing in formal training with The OCM, we highlight the importance of this programme and how it will contribute to our employees' professional development and our organisational success."

MENTORING SUPPORT

CRUK's mentoring programme operates as a two-way street, with both mentors and mentees actively engaged. This promotes growth and professional development for everyone involved. The programme is also supported by internal resources, such as a dedicated Teams chat channel for networking, as well as online tools to assist in structuring mentoring conversations.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

The Synergy programme has received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Initially attracting just 15 mentors and around 30 mentees, participation has almost doubled. Denyse is now a dedicated resource for the programme and shared, **"The benefits of seeing mutually rewarding mentor-mentee relationships blossom are hugely rewarding! We regularly hear stories about how mentoring has empowered employees to move forward with their careers and develop new skills, contributing to staff retention."**

SUCCESS STORIES

The success of CRUK's programme is exemplified by mentors like Giovanna Morsiani, a Biomarker Development Specialist, who developed her leadership skills through mentoring. She found The OCM training invaluable, stating,

"The training significantly enhanced my listening skills and made me more empathetic. I now connect better with my mentees and apply these skills in my day job."

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While the Synergy programme encountered challenges, like setting up a self-service model on the FUSE platform and automating the time-consuming matching process, it has successfully cultivated a nurturing environment. This environment empowers employees to proactively advance their careers and fosters a culture of support within the organisation.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The Synergy programme is now central to CRUK's HR engagement strategy. As it grows, CRUK plans to explore ways to automate and streamline the matching process, potentially expanding its reach and impact.

CONCLUSION

By investing in the Synergy mentoring programme and partnering with The OCM for mentor training, Cancer Research UK has created a culture of continuous learning and support. The programme has significantly contributed to employee development, engagement, and retention, demonstrating the powerful impact of mentoring on organisational success.

