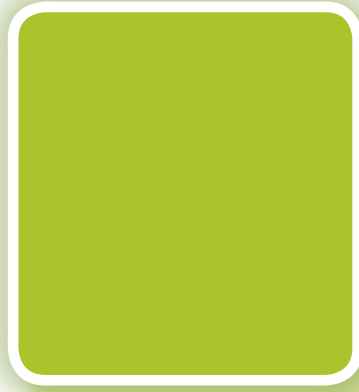


# THE GREAT MENTOR

**XEROX'S WOMEN'S  
ALLIANCE CRACKS THE  
CODE ON SUCCESSFUL  
MENTOR PROGRAMS.**

By Beth N. Carvin





**Every large organization faces a challenge in facilitating career development for diversity and affinity groups. Mentoring is a logical strategy, but mentor recruitment and mentor-mentee matching are often too unwieldy and time-consuming for a volunteer effort in a large company.**

At Xerox, however, an initiative launched by an employee caucus group known as The Women's Alliance (TWA) has conquered those problems. TWA is using electronic self-service mentor matching software that is web-based, administration-light, and low-cost enough to be covered by modest member dues. Prospective mentors and mentees maintain profiles of their areas of expertise and desired areas of development and then search for matches based on these or any other parameters in the profile.

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Since the mentoring program went into full operation in late 2007, it has been responsible for creating more than 60 mentorships, with more added on a regular basis. Word has spread throughout Xerox, and other caucus groups are now climbing on board.

Much of the credit for the program's success goes to the automated mentor-mentee matching process. "It would be very difficult to grow the program [without the use of technology]," said TWA Mentoring Program Chair Patricia Hill, whose voluntary board role is in addition to her full-time job responsibilities as an internal consultant focusing on Lean Six Sigma initiatives. "We have our jobs at home and our jobs at work as well as our interests in personal and community development."

### The value of mentoring

Successful mentorships are often a key catalyst for career and personal development. Good mentors can help mentees discover their strengths and weaknesses, formulate a career path, set goals, manage stress, and balance work and personal obligations. Working together, the mentor and mentee can identify barriers to career growth and brainstorm ways to overcome them.

Mentorships also foster career development through transfer of knowledge, introduction of the mentee to key people within the organization, and nomination and sponsorship of the mentee for high-profile task forces.

The results are tangible. According to the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, research on a 1,000-participant mentoring program at a high-technology firm

throughout a five-year period found that mentees were promoted five times more frequently—and mentors, six times more often—than those who were not in the program.

Terry Scandura, professor of management and dean of the graduate school at the University of Miami, states that mentoring is a best practice for organizations in today's "hyper turbulent" times. In fact, 71 percent of the Fortune 500 have mentoring programs. Scandura's research suggests that mentorship-related learning and development are difficult to duplicate through training classes, seminars, and books.

While informal mentoring may crop up organically, Scandura supports formal mentoring programs. The key is in making the right mentor-mentee match, where the mentor is able to provide the mentee with appropriate career development as well as psychosocial support.

### The matching challenge

Mentor-mentee matching is not only the most important part of administering a mentoring program; it is also the most challenging. Depending on the size of the program, this process can take hours, days, or weeks.

One large retailer's matching process consisted of spending a day in the conference room with a giant stack of written profiles. The mentoring team reviewed and evaluated each profile. To create matches, they noted each participant's name on a yellow sticky note. They then matched mentors and mentees by coupling up the sticky notes onto the walls of the conference room until every mentee was matched with a mentor.

For employee affinity groups, this kind of time-consuming methodology is not feasible. Affinity groups, popularized after the 1995 release of the Glass Ceiling Commission recommendations, are employee-driven networking groups built upon a common interest or diversity demographic.

The groups are created and run by employee volunteers with (usually limited) resources provided by the company. As a result, group-sponsored initiatives need to be easy to kick off and administer. For mentoring programs, that includes the mentor-mentee matching process.

### The Xerox solution

At Xerox, TWA faced and overcame that challenge. TWA is an employee caucus group that has been active for more than two decades. One of the group's founders was Anne Mulcahy, who is now the CEO of Xerox. Today, TWA has more than 800 dues-paying members. Its mission is to help advance the personal and professional development of women at Xerox, enabling each to attain their goals.

Throughout the years, TWA members repeatedly expressed the need for a formal mentoring program to help them accelerate their careers at the company as well as deal with issues such as networking across a global enterprise and crafting a career path in alignment with their skills,

interests, and aspirations. With this in mind, TWA made attempts to start a mentoring program in the early 2000s.

Their first try required board members to manually match mentors and mentees. This turned out to be too labor-intensive for the volunteers, and they were not able to get the program off the ground.

In 2005, a TWA working group was established to develop a more practical strategy. Several TWA members had been involved with online mentoring technology outside of Xerox, and they suggested there might be a way of doing the matching as well as tracking program results electronically.

In mid-2006, the group began investigating commercial tools available for this purpose. The committee evaluated three different programs, based on pre-determined criteria, including ease of administration, price, and adaptability to TWA's needs. The committee selected Mentor Scout ([www.mentorscout.com](http://www.mentorscout.com)), a web-based program that has been used by organizations ranging from The Home Depot and Best Buy to Brunswick, General Mills, and Scotiabank.

### Customized profiles

With the technology, prospective TWA mentors and mentees complete their profiles online. The profile, which was customized by Mentor Scout for TWA, includes information on the participant's background and interests and what they are hoping to achieve by participating in the mentoring program.

Specifically, the TWA mentoring profile includes fields for geographic location, business group, department, job level, years with the company, areas of expertise, areas for development, education, certifications, and community service, among other items. The areas of expertise and development

fields include a tailored list of Xerox-specific choices such as customer relationship management, design for Lean Six Sigma, global perspective, inspiring a shared vision, managing change, managing operational performance, and work-life balance.

After a TWA mentee completes and submits her profile, she uses the technology's search capability to locate an appropriate match from the pool of TWA mentors. Using pull-down boxes, she sets the search criteria to the skills, experience, and background she is seeking.

For example, a mentee might conduct a search for a mentor working in the global services business group who has been with Xerox for more than 10 years, is an expert in Lean Six Sigma, managing innovation, and statistical analysis, and has a master's degree or MBA. The system then automatically returns a list of mentors who meet all or some of the selected criteria.

After reviewing the profiles of the suggested mentors, the mentee chooses the person she would most like to have as her mentor. An email is sent to the selected mentor, who reviews the mentee's profile and either accepts or declines the request. If the request is accepted, the mentor and mentee are officially paired as a mentorship.

### Launching the program

The Women's Alliance at Xerox piloted their program from November 2006 through May 2007. The TWA board

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recruited 35 executive-level mentors and invited attendees of its annual International Women's Conference to participate in the pilot. The offer attracted 42 prospective mentees.

During the pilot, 34 mentorships were established. After the pilot was completed, TWA conducted a survey to collect feedback, and 100 percent of the respondents said they would "enthusiastically recommend" the program.

The TWA mentoring program went into full operation in June of 2007. As of this writing, there are approximately 175 participants and 60 active mentorships. Participants are enthusiastic.

"My mentoring experience has been invaluable to my career," said Megan Thompson, a software engineer and mentee in the program. "My mentor has helped me develop my career plan, ask critical questions about assignments, and connect with senior management. Since she is in a completely different functional area than I am, she also provides an insight and an understanding into the business that I would not be able to obtain in my current role and organization."

Financial planning analyst Andrea Klavsons is an equally avid supporter. "It has been a life-changing experience. I gained perspective that I simply didn't have on my own. One mentoring session gave me enough material for a lifetime of work. My mentor is brilliant!"

### Beyond TWA

In September 2007, TWA President Marlene Bessette attended a biannual roundtable of other Xerox caucus group presidents, along with their senior executive group champions. She shared the story of their mentoring program. As a result, the diversity office and Bessette asked Hill to make a presentation to all interested parties.

The presentations sparked a great deal of attention, and in January of 2008, the Asians Coming Together (ACT) caucus group began their own mentoring pilot. The Gay/Lesbian, Hispanic, and Black Women's Leadership groups have also expressed interest.

Meanwhile, back at TWA, the mentoring program continues to grow—largely because organizers have overcome the need for mentees to find mentors on their own or for TWA board members to match people manually.

For Hill and other TWA board members, the online, self-matching approach makes it possible to focus on promoting, managing, and measuring the success of the program instead of playing matchmaker. For TWA members themselves, the mentoring program provides an avenue to take their development into their own hands by finding a mentor who will help them reach their potential.

For other organizations, TWA presents an object lesson in how a volunteer group can seamlessly run a mentoring program. **T+D**

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