

Complete Healthcare Compliance Manual 2024

Mentoring for Compliance Professionals

By Sarah Couture^[1]

In the last several decades, mentoring has become a career-related cultural buzzword, discussed everywhere, from coffee shops to college classrooms to leadership meetings. While it is a word we may hear a lot, it may be less clear what exactly it is, why it is important for compliance professionals, and how to pursue it. At its core, mentoring is investing in the development of others. For the sake of this article, mentoring will be discussed as it relates to the compliance profession and compliance professionals. Mentoring is not just one-sided. The Association for Talent Development defines mentoring as “a reciprocal and collaborative at-will relationship that most often occurs between a senior and junior employee for the purpose of the mentee’s growth, learning, and career development.”^[2]

While the focus in mentoring is certainly on the development of the other person, a natural byproduct of the activity, when employed successfully, is also the growth of the mentor. The American Psychological Association (APA), which has published a mentoring guide for its profession, defines a mentor as “an individual with expertise who can help develop the career of a mentee.”^[3] The APA shares that a mentor’s role is often twofold: career-related, “advi[sing] to enhance the mentee’s professional performance and development,” and psychosocially related, “establish[ing] the mentor as a role model and support system for the mentee.”

This article will discuss various concepts and approaches to mentoring that can be beneficial for compliance professionals as well as for the long-term well-being of the compliance profession. It will discuss why mentoring is indispensable, who can mentor, and who can benefit from mentoring; it will provide methods that may be tailored, blended, and implemented to achieve effective mentoring.

Why Mentoring

The success of most compliance professionals is tied to, among other things, multiple individuals who, intentionally or not, invested time, training, and some level of care into them. Consider your own professional journey. There were managers and supervisors along the way who provided varied levels of input and shaping to your career. Among them, consider those who stand out, seemed gifted in their ability to impact and shape those around them, and may have seen something in you that inspired them to come alongside you and help you go to the next level, whether they were formal or informal mentors. Each person is who they are to a significant degree, both professionally and personally, because of those who shaped and invested in them. Mentoring, in turn, becomes a way to “pay it forward.” As some level of each person’s professional success can be attributed to others’ investment, each person, in turn, has the opportunity and, perhaps, even the obligation to invest in others in their particular sphere of influence.

From a very practical perspective, investing in those on compliance program teams should help contribute to the ongoing pursuit of the compliance program’s effectiveness. Investing in others, whether as part of one’s compliance program or one’s professional network, will also help ensure the continued evolution and success of the healthcare compliance profession. Finally, mentoring does not just contribute to the professional and psychosocial growth of the mentee but also results in the development of the mentor. Mentors may grow and benefit from mentoring in a variety of ways, such as having their own ideas or perspectives challenged or

widened, deriving satisfaction from helping others as well as a renewed energy for their own career growth, learning how to use newer or different technologies, and learning about new methods or professional concerns of which they were not previously aware.^[4]

Individuals seek mentoring for many reasons that can evolve. These reasons may include the desire to grow as a leader, perform better in specific work-related ways, develop better soft skills such as confidence or communication, and get advice and input on career growth and development decisions.^[5]

Who Mentors Whom

Almost anyone can be a mentor, as mentors just need to have experiences and expertise that may help further develop another person.^[6] Regardless of one's stage in their career, each person has lessons learned, obstacles overcome, and evolving perspectives to share that can have a positive impact on those coming up behind them. A recent college graduate starting their first compliance position can impact those considering a compliance degree. A midlevel supervisor with several years of experience can be helpful to a new compliance professional joining the team. A more senior-level compliance manager can help the "middle bench" team navigate the next steps in their career. And so on. At all stages of one's professional journey, there are those coming up behind who can benefit from mentoring.

Students, new compliance professionals, newly hired team members, and those seeking assistance in career advancement are often interested in being mentored. But almost anyone can be a mentee. A compliance professional never "arrives" but should always be learning, growing, and evolving in both their professional expertise and leadership skills. Even seasoned professionals should continue learning from others through formal or informal mentoring or other professional relationships.

As referenced in the Association for Talent Development definition and in the practical reality of time and seasoning, mentoring is often oriented around those more junior in their careers. While mentoring should be considered and is beneficial at any stage, more senior compliance professionals should be encouraged to invest in the next generation of compliance professionals, whether they are less-experienced incoming compliance team members or compliance students/interns. Compliance programs and professional organizations can both promote mentoring and develop mentoring frameworks and opportunities for their stakeholders.

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