A healthcare organizations guide to modern L&D

To combat talent shortages across the industry, healthcare organizations must find new ways to attract and retain talent.
# Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare your workforce for the skills economy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By David Gedeon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Ideas for creating training incentives for employees</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Carol Anderson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The case for comprehensive leadership development in healthcare</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Christine Corning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Tips to creating a learning culture in healthcare</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Steve Dobberowsky</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using learning and performance to drive nurse engagement</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Industry brief</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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David Gedeon has been part of the Learning and Talent Management sector since 1999. During his time in the space he’s worked with C level leaders at companies such as IBM, Yum Brands, AT&T, Verizon, Coca Cola, Deloitte, UPS and HCA. This experience has allowed David to set the standard for a strong foundation and clear vision for companies looking to achieve their Learning and Talent Management goals and objectives.

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Carol Anderson is the founder and Principal of Anderson Performance Partners, LLC, a business consultancy focused on bringing together organizational leaders to unite all aspects of the business – CEO, CFO, HR – to build, implement and evaluate a workforce alignment strategy. With over 35 years of executive leadership, she brings a unique lens and proven methodologies to help CEOs demand performance from HR and to develop the capability of HR to deliver business results.

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Steve has served 11 years of Federal Government competitive service with 7 years in HR and HR IT leadership roles ensuring effective talent management processes at a bureau level, at the Department level and at a Shared Service Center where he delivered solutions for multiple agencies. He is a proven, business-savvy leader with a track record of providing high quality, innovative services and solutions.
Introduction

Severe talent shortages are jeopardizing healthcare organizations’ ability to provide the best possible care to patients. Overworked and understaffed, over half of nurses in the U.S. report having at least one sign of burnout, according to a recent survey by the RNnetwork. And the problem will only get worse—the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates healthcare providers will need to hire over one million new nurses by 2022.

To meet this growing demand, healthcare organizations need to make attracting new talent and retaining current workers their number one priority. But how?

Investing in learning and development opportunities will be crucial for recruiting and retention because career growth is a key motivating factor for nurses. In fact, a survey at The Nursing Times Career Live! event hosted by the National Health Service (NHS) revealed that learning and development opportunities are the top attribute nurses look for in a new employer. Plus, as new treatments and medical technologies emerge, upskilling has the potential to reduce burnout by enabling nurses to challenge themselves, sharpen their medical knowledge and continue to provide the best possible care to patients.

In this guidebook, learn how to create a culture of learning and development that empowers nurses to grow professionally. In doing so, you’ll make your organization a destination for healthcare workers who are not only looking to launch their career, but also develop the skills they need to advance it.
With the life and wellbeing of patients constantly at stake, health care will always have one foot outside the mainstream world of business. But real-world financial and regulatory pressures are beginning to reshape health care, adding more and more business-like pressures. For example, federal officials maintain their goal of switching 50 percent of Medicare and Medicaid payments away from fee-for-service and toward value-based pay by 2018. And a 2017 McKinsey & Company report said consumer choices now “have the potential to affect 61 percent of all health care spending.”
According to results from a new survey of healthcare executives by Cornerstone OnDemand and WBR Insights, a conferencing and networking firm for business leaders, the most agile and adaptable institutions in health care are constantly reviewing their skills and their deficits. As such, top healthcare systems and institutions are looking to acquire skills and specialties from the private business sector to prepare for a world where doctor-patient relationships more resemble business-consumer relationships.

Moreover, to cope with the rapid pace of change in healthcare, executives from Cornerstone, Healthcare HR and WBR recommend staying ahead not only by hiring from non-health industries to maximize your business talent, but also offering constant and convenient career-long learning for your current talent.

**Tapping private sector talent**

The survey of 119 health executives found that while many healthcare companies welcome the new skills economy and feel their employees are prepared, many of those same executives are aware they have to step up their efforts to source talent from the private sector. When asked if new employees from the private sector “will help our organization,” 76 percent of the executives agreed or strongly agreed.

Shawn Ray, director of nursing talent acquisition at BJC HealthCare, a healthcare system in Missouri and Illinois, said systems like hers have had great success hiring non-health executives schooled in the “lean management” techniques developed among manufacturers.

When asked if new employees from the private sector “will help our organization,” 76 percent of the executives agreed or strongly agreed.
Jason Hopkins, director of talent acquisition and internal marketing for Emerus Holdings, a developer and operator of micro-hospitals in the Southern and Western parts of the U.S, found similar success in hiring talent outside healthcare. Emerus’s VP of strategy came from the telecom industry with an expertise in culling data for the best cell tower locations. Hopkins says many of the same data skills translate to seeking locations for micro-hospitals.

**Upskilling the current workforce**

Thanks to advancements in business and technology, the demand on healthcare organizations and employees is the same for high-functioning workers across industries: Willingness and opportunity to be lifelong learners. Over a third of survey respondents indicated that they are not confident they have the skills to adapt to this new skills economy.

Dr. Tom Tonkin, principal in thought leadership and advisory services for Cornerstone OnDemand, advises approaching the coming artificial intelligence systems and other technologies as job-changers, not job destroyers. While machines that draw patient’s blood may replace some phlebotomists, he said, “who is going to fix the machine, and make sure it’s in the right work flow? That job doesn’t exist, but it will.”

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To prepare to fill these roles, health companies should seek out employees who are enthusiastic about advancing their knowledge and careers, and find the best HR techniques and technologies to help them do so. BJC HealthCare, like many hospital systems, offers incentive pay for advanced degrees and financial help going back to school, Ray said. Simulation labs throughout their hospital system are “always booked” as providers and technical staff try to keep up with the rigors of acute patient environments.
Moreover, learning platforms can help address many of the skills gaps already appearing in healthcare. Seventy percent of survey respondents, for example, agreed with the statement, “regulation dictates our operations.” These regulations add a layer of complexity to administrative tasks that many existing employees aren’t equipped to handle. Many learning platforms can allow administrative staff to learn these new ins and outs on their smartphones—a tool they are used to learning from, study participants noted.

Overall, the survey unearthed the following key tactics for those trying to stay ahead of change in healthcare’s new skills economy:

1. Consider drawing on more private sector talent outside your organization to meet the challenges of relentless regulatory pressure and increasing empowerment of consumers.

2. Promote a culture of continuous learning within your organization. Yes, retain and promote existing talent — but also help ensure your best people have the chance to learn new skills.

3. Leverage HR learning tools to become more systematic about evaluating your current talent and pointing employees in the direction of optimal skills development. Knowing what your people are learning and how will help you stay effective.

“The most successful organizations will seek out lifelong learners, and then invest in them,” said Cathy Martin, vice president of workforce policy for the California Hospital Association. “They will have the best performing workforce and likely the best patient outcomes.”

To read the full survey analysis, click here.
Though it’s critical, employee training can be overwhelming and cumbersome for all the parties involved. A healthcare client of mine recently described the challenge her company faces when it comes to getting employees engaged in training: Workers are constantly asking, “When will I get my job done when I have to spend so much time in training?”

This dilemma is particularly prevalent in highly-regulated industries where many different types of trainings are required, but it’s a pretty common problem at other organizations, as well. In fact, during my ten years as a Chief Learning Officer, the toughest obstacle was never designing training or even getting executive buy-in, it was getting employees to take advantage of the training we provided.

5 Ideas for creating training incentives for employees

By Carol Anderson
In today’s busy world, it isn’t enough to say, “Just do it.” For training to become a priority for workers, sometimes they need a little push. Here are 5 ideas to think about when creating training incentives for employees.

1. **Demonstrate the value of training**
   Sometimes the connection between training requirements and an employee’s actual job is not clear. This disconnect often occurs because of compliance requirements—there are many regulations that require training to cover a host of improbable situations that seem far-removed from daily work, but a department leader can and should connect the dots for employees.

   For example, in the healthcare field, non-clinical employees are sometimes required to take a course on blood borne pathogens even if they don’t typically come in contact with patients. Managers should explain that sharing facilities with patients or clinical employees places them in danger, too. It’s up to managers to demonstrate that they’re part of a broader effort to prevent disease—that’s why it’s important for them to understand how to protect themselves and avoid spreading illness.

   If the leader cannot find a connection or application, perhaps it’s worth asking why this training is required in the first place. Sometimes training requirements are mandated for all employees rather than a segment because it makes administration and tracking easier; still, that’s something leaders should clarify to their teams.

2. **Create learning opportunities through training**
   Training shouldn’t be perceived as a chore—it should be seen as a chance to learn something new. If some elements of your corporate training are voluntary, offer to enter those who complete certain courses into a drawing to attend a conference related to the training topic.

   Employees will be motivated by the chance to not only travel and represent the company at an industry event, but also gain new responsibility and growth opportunities. The individual that’s ultimately selected will be able to bring back new knowledge to his team and add to his skill set.
Embrace some healthy competition

Many learning platforms offer rewards programs that create healthy competition among peers. Badges that were once the hallmark of computer games have made their way into gamified learning programs—providing rewards for different accomplishments.

When an employee completes a course, or reaches a certain level, she can display a badge on her online profile to brag about her accomplishment. As others compete to best her achievement, the competition fuels training completions.

If your learning platform doesn’t offer badges, you can still create the sense of healthy competition by posting completions publicly. Adding pins or stickers to employee ID badges is one way to make this a fun challenge.

Be selective about rewards and courses to drive ROI

Patrick Lencioni, founder of consulting firm The Table Group, once wrote, “If everything is important, nothing is.” Keep this in mind as you develop a rewards system for training. Focus your rewards program on courses that will drive the most ROI for your organization. Most likely, this will include more targeted, niche courses rather than standard training that’s required for compliance.

Training should improve behaviors or skills in an effort to boost business. If the training doesn’t accomplish this, and it isn’t mandated by regulation, then, why do it?

Measure the impact of trainings, and make the ones that actually improve performance stand out. Do you have a new product launching soon that the sales team needs to better understand? That new product training should become a target for a compelling employee incentive or reward.

Use incentive bursts

Change up your approach to employee training incentives frequently, or the incentives will get stale and lose their power. Choose one topic each month, promote the training in multiple places, track the completions, measure the impact and reward participants publicly. Then move on.

Training programs, including mandatory ones, aren’t going away. On the contrary, as emerging technology enters the workplace, we’ll likely see the need for training to grow. Now is the time to teach your workforce that relevant training means improved performance.
How to thrive amid new realities in healthcare

Strong leadership is crucial for any organization. However, for healthcare organizations, the ability to attract, cultivate, and retain great leaders will be key to navigating new realities: reduced funding, changes in technology, increased compliance regulations, and the imperative to improve diversity.

Yet just as great leaders are needed more than ever before, healthcare organizations are finding it increasingly difficult to both find and retain them. Not only are Baby Boomers retiring in greater numbers, but a very real skills shortage means talented employees have more choices about where they work—and how long they stay.

How can healthcare organizations not only attract strong leaders but also more effectively cultivate and retain them? With leadership development.
The case for leadership development

A comprehensive, well-designed leadership development program helps healthcare organizations:

• Ensure new and existing leaders are equipped to meet future challenges
• Compete in the talent shortage by attracting, engaging, and retaining top talent

Leadership in healthcare is complex. Not only must leaders serve the interests of multiple stakeholders—patients, doctors, nurses, healthcare staff, and the community—but the traditional, i.e., tenured, path to leadership puts faculty and organizations at a disadvantage. The deep subject knowledge and skills necessary to teach and research effectively are distinct from those required to lead. In contrast, providing leadership candidates with development opportunities can help ensure they are ready to navigate:

• Increasingly complex social challenges, growing dissatisfaction with the structure and model of health care
• Pressure from patients, patient families, and the public to demonstrate high-quality care
• Increased regulation constraints due to changes in compliance and interpretation of compliance regulations
• The changing nature of technology and how new developments, e.g., the increased use of artificial intelligence, will change learning and work environments

“The deep subject knowledge and skills necessary to teach and research effectively are distinct from those required to lead.”

Improve the ability to attract, engage, and retain talent.

From a talent management perspective, leadership development helps healthcare organizations:

• Attract new talent, even as the competition for top talent increases, by offering candidates meaningful career development and leadership opportunities.
• Engage and retain existing talent by providing continuous development and increased responsibility
• Support succession management—just as leadership development builds skills and drives engagement, it also creates a ready pipeline for succession

Build and nurture relationships—great leadership can foster collaboration, rather than competition, between individuals, departments, and administrators.
Building a leadership development program: 6 key elements

What constitutes an effective leadership development program? Broadly, it’s one that helps individuals expand their capacity and institutions to ensure continuity and mission. More specifically, an effective leadership development strategy is one that:

1. **Unifies leadership development and recruiting practices.** Healthcare organizations that unify recruiting practices and leadership development can hire for desired leadership aptitudes and subsequently foster and support those aptitudes with targeted leadership training.

2. **Offers both general leadership development training and targeted training.** There are two kinds of leadership training: general and targeted. General leadership development focuses on competencies applicable to all healthcare leaders, e.g., management, ethics. Targeted training focuses on leadership skills specific to departments.

3. **Supports on-the-job practice of leadership skills with formal training.** While hands-on practice of leadership skills is crucial, people must also have an initial framework for learning those skills. Formal training—e.g., curriculum focused on competency development—creates a point of reference for on-the-job learning and practice; in turn, on-the-job learning provides real-life context for formalized learning.

4. **Relies on curriculum specific to the unique leadership challenges in healthcare.** Generic content won’t be as effective in developing leaders as content designed for those working in healthcare.

5. **Uses data and analytics to drive continuous improvement and demonstrate ROI.** For administrators, learning analytics are crucial to proving ROI and integrating learning with succession and performance.

6. **Makes it easy to access learning opportunities.** People are more likely to engage in learning—and be self-directed—when courses are easy to access, i.e., available asynchronously, from multiple devices, etc.
Costs of recruiting solutions for top medical industry talent are rising dramatically for healthcare organizations, and it may be too much to bear: the average cost of a new hire in healthcare is $5,611, and overall acquisition costs for healthcare rose 16 percent.¹

So, with external recruiting becoming more cost-unfriendly by the day, how can administrators ensure their workforce has the right capabilities to provide top-notch patient care? They can invest in learning opportunities for their team!
The truth behind training

Managers may counter by highlighting what they already offer: We do lots of instructor-led classroom training! Plus, we have books in the staff break room!

Those are nice to have, but they don’t connect with today’s learners. Listening to yet another outside consultant delivers all the ‘wow’ factor of an 8:00am high school class in Ferris Bueller’s Day Off. And if you want your team to spend their free time reading, then you’d better also provide the beach, good weather, and a blended pink drink with matching umbrella.

Tips for an impactful learning culture that resonates with your workforce

Provide content they can use. Modern learners want training modules that are media-rich, interactive, and social-enabled. Mix videos with text to address the various learning styles your staff prefers. Allow learners to rate, share, and discuss content – this drives engagement and participation, while also helping admins identify which employees have leadership skills. Employees should be able to access (or be assigned) modules that address skill gaps, add to their competencies, or even prep them for future roles.

“Mix videos with text to address the various learning styles your staff prefers.”

So how can health and safety training experts provide an innovative learning environment that is impactful and innovative? It’s simple – make learning personalized to the needs of your team! Today’s workers are more unique and different than prior generations, but with the widespread availability of next-gen performance management technologies, you can address their training needs more easily than ever.

Make training accessible 24/7

Ever notice how people are glued to their phones? Don’t fight that! Instead, blend your team’s tech savviness with your learning initiatives. Provide employee training software that is available 24/7, and mobile device-friendly; this enables workers to develop their skills when it’s most convenient for them. Limiting your
growth initiatives to classroom learning or scheduled, formal opportunities slows the rate at which employees can develop their competencies. On the admin side, those ‘traditional’ methods aren’t always budget-friendly, and integrating learning technologies into your training culture is a low-cost solution.

**Foster a culture of collaborative learning**

Learning is more effective, and retention is higher, when employees take on the role of both the student AND the teacher. This enables everyone to show off and demonstrate their best skills, and learn from others in a more informal, stress-free environment. Your team can exchange invaluable knowledge, share best practices, and trade the key healthcare tips you can only learn from experience. These collaborative discussions also play a positive role during employee performance evaluations, even if you’re not a huge fan of SCRUBS. How critical is collaborative learning? In a 2013 Bersin study, 87 percent said sharing knowledge with their team is “very important” or “essential” to learning in the workplace.  

**Deliver measurable results to execs**

Ok, so this one isn’t a ‘tip,’ but it’s a critical element to the compliance training and skills development process. You’ll need executive buy-in before starting a training initiative, and if you want that green light to stay green, then you need to:

- Establish metrics for success
- Show how your strategy will hit those metrics
- Deliver results that show you achieved employee growth on a smaller budget

Today’s workforce is passionate, but to fully capitalize on their career goals, you’ll need to offer training sessions that address their needs. They want usable content that is quickly accessible, and the more you can leverage innovative technologies, including mobile devices, the faster they’ll learn (and at a lower cost to admins!). Learning should also be collaborative, so ditch pricey consultants and stop eating travel costs; you’d be surprised how much knowledge is already in your organization. You just need to provide a platform where it can be shared. Last, show cost-conscious execs your strategy to get their approval.

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2. Bersin, Learning in the Workplace, 2013
Healthcare organizations must have skilled, engaged nurses now more than ever before. Experts estimate the United States alone will need over one million new nurses by 2022,\(^1\) just as 73% of Baby Boomer nurses say that they plan to retire in a mere three years. For healthcare organizations, retaining these new hires, as well as existing nursing staff, will be crucial to providing high-quality patient care in the next five years.\(^2\) Yet nurse attrition is already at an all-time high. Survey-based studies show that 43% of newly licensed hospital nurses quit within three years.\(^3\) Nurses everywhere are increasingly overwhelmed by the demands of the profession: a growing number of patients, the need for more documentation,
and new, more complex responsibilities. Because of these and other factors, 15 out of every 100 nurses are increasingly disengaged, per research by Press Ganey.4

The high cost of nurse disengagement

Nurse disengagement is expensive on many levels. Each disengaged nurse may cost an organization $22,200 a year in loss of productivity,5 and nurse engagement is the “No. 1 predictor of mortality variation across hospitals.”6 Nurses who are disengaged are also at risk of becoming burned out, i.e., emotionally exhausted and at risk of depersonalizing interactions with patients. And burnout is linked to an increased rate of patient hospital-acquired infections,7 lower quality of care,8 and increased patient mortality. The good news? Organizations can begin today to re-engage nurses. How? By enabling continuous learning and frequent performance feedback.

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“Burnout is linked to lower quality of care, and increased patient mortality.”

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Stemming disengagement with learning and performance

Studies show that providing nurses with ongoing learning and frequent and meaningful feedback can increase engagement, reduce turnover, and, most critically, ensure patient satisfaction and safety.

Ongoing learning

Within healthcare organizations, learning and development are useful for more than maintaining compliance. For nurses, continuous training nurtures engagement and increases commitment to both the job and the organization. Learning opportunities also help nurses feel more confident and experienced on the floor, as well as excited about the future. In a recent survey, over 50% of nurses said “a lack of advancement opportunities was the biggest workplace challenge.”9 Nurses are far more engaged when they can design meaningful career paths and have access to the training necessary to support those future roles.

In addition, providing access to continuous learning opportunities helps build a true learning culture, which in turn creates a “shared vision” among nurses and other staff. This can function as a buffer against events beyond staff control, such as budget changes, increased patient loads, or other external events.
This “shared vision”—e.g., what is deemed to be critical from a care perspective, what is expected of all nurses—provides stability, structure, and support for new and existing nurses facing industry and organizational changes.

**Frequent performance feedback**

Frequent performance feedback—i.e., more than once a year—also drives engagement. When used in tandem with ongoing learning, frequent feedback ensures nurses feel heard, cared for, and valued by the organization. And similar to ongoing learning, feedback-frequent performance management also provides a more “unified approach” to nursing within an organization. Known standards and benchmarks enable nurses to know what they’re doing right—and what needs improvement—as individuals and as part of a team. Levels of employee satisfaction, engagement, and commitment have also been shown to increase in tandem with an organization’s succession planning efforts. 43% of newly licensed hospital nurses quit within three years.

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7. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2908908/
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