

DO IT RIGHT: WITH MENTORSHIP

Develop and support a diverse, multigenerational team with mentorship opportunities that can benefit everyone — and your business.

MENTORSHIP PAYS DIVIDENDS

Mentorship benefits everyone. Having a mentor can provide the career direction and on-the-job learning that millennial employees seek, help prepare members of the next generation to take over the family business and offer a sounding board or supportive network for the industry's underrepresented groups, including women and minorities. "We have to staff for tomorrow, and part of that is developing a supportive culture that will help propel the next iteration of the dealership and the next generation of leadership," says Todd Smith, a former dealer who's now CEO of ActivEngage, an auto technology company he co-founded. For a dealership, a mentorship program can keep team members—both new employees and veterans — engaged, connected and growing in their careers. Here are two dealers who found their professional footing through mentorship:

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it
RIGHT!

KARMALA SUTTON

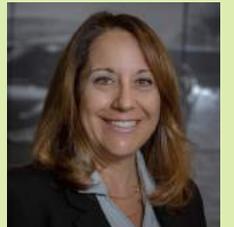


Karmala Sutton admits that last year, she was struggling to find her place within her family's dealership. While training to become a second-generation dealer principal at Honda of Kenosha in southeastern Wisconsin, "I was having communication problems with team members," Sutton says. "My dad suggested I get a mentor." After some initial qualms, Sutton took the advice of her father, Nate, and found a mentor in a family friend who works outside

the auto industry. "His perspective is open and broad, and he helps me work out ideas and work through situations," Sutton says. "Working with a mentor, especially as a woman in a male-dominated world, has opened my eyes to see how to communicate better and to see situations from another point of view. It's been a great learning opportunity for me." Although Sutton also has a support network in the National Association of Minority Automobile Dealers' NextGen group of younger minority dealership leaders, she likes having a mentor outside the industry. "If I talk to someone who works at another store, there's a lot of noise in the conversation," she says. "Someone who doesn't work in the industry doesn't let the industry stuff distract from the real issues."

JUDY FARCUS SERRA

Judy Farcus Serra knows she was fortunate to have a boss who recognized her potential when she started her career in the automotive industry as an assistant controller. Judy's boss began assigning her projects and showing her new tasks. With each new challenge, Serra rose to the occasion, and continued growing in her career. Serra later followed her boss to Headquarter Auto in Miami, and when he left the controller's job in 2002, Headquarter Auto offered the position to Serra. "Phil Lynch was a mentor who kept giving me opportunities and was pivotal to my career growth," said Serra, now CFO of Headquarter and its four Florida dealerships. "Today, in order to retain high-quality thinkers in this business, we need to offer them support." Serra is trying to do just that. In addition to informally mentoring several people in her organization, Serra is part of a team at Headquarter that is working to develop a more formal program aimed at attracting and mentoring college graduates. "Our company is 28 years old and key employees are retiring, leaving very big shoes to fill," Serra said. "We need to keep an engaged and committed workforce and keep those key positions filled — the only way we will achieve that is through this type of mentorship program."



SEEKING A MENTOR?

Think about what you want out of a mentorship. Do you want to learn things, or are you looking for someone who can introduce you to people? Dr. Rubina Malik, a strategic adviser to organizations, suggests finding "someone who has a successful track record — it doesn't matter if that's a dealership executive, a restaurant owner or a Wall Street executive. If they're successful, the relationship will be worthwhile to learn from." If you do want a mentor within the industry, Malik says: "Don't just go up — go horizontal and vertical and all around you. Also, just because someone isn't in your organization, doesn't mean they can't support you." She advises staying away from industry celebrities who might not have time to mentor you on a consistent basis. "Don't be star-struck," Malik says

OWN OR RUN A DEALERSHIP?

Consider establishing a mentorship program. "I think there's huge value in the tribe mentality — taking the older veterans and pairing them with the younger generation creates a mutually beneficial experience," says ActivEngage's Smith. "But understand that mentorship isn't a thing to dabble in. Make a long-term plan. A dealership should first decide what sort of mentorship program is appropriate for its culture — a strictly run business might have something more structured than a dealership with a more casual environment," Smith says. Says Malik: "Most individuals don't leave a company because of money. They leave because they don't feel appreciated and/or there is a lack of expansion. A formal mentorship relationship helps an individual feel recognized, engaged and that you are investing in their growth."

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