

# Leading Learner

For Pamela Puryear, VP of organizational development and chief talent officer at Hospira Inc., a learning culture is just good business.

By Tamara Lytle

**E**ven in a family of Ph.D.s, Pamela Puryear is an overachiever. Her education didn't end when she obtained her doctorate. Learning has become central to her professional life—and she believes it should be integrated into every company's DNA. Indeed, the thought leader and organizational development expert maintains that learning should be a priority at every level of a business and not just the purview of HR.

Her passion for education started early. As a child growing up in New York City, she was influenced by parents who were Ph.D.s and college professors. After earning her MBA at Harvard University, Puryear got involved in the real estate investment business for 10 years and then spent 12 years running her own consulting firm. But as her clients' needs morphed from how to start a business to how to develop vision, structure, search and performance goals, so did her interests.

So she jumped headfirst into learning

about organizational development, picking up a doctorate in organizational psychology. Soon, she was packing up her San Francisco consulting practice and heading to the Chicago area to join Hospira, a Lake Forest, Ill., company that makes injectable drugs and infusion treatments. A Harvard classmate brought her in as a consultant at first and then created an organizational development staff role for her in 2009.

Heather Mitchell, president and chief operating officer of Capri Capital Partners, a Chicago investment firm, says her friend is highly adaptable, so it was no surprise that she could switch from real estate to consulting to organizational development. "She's very deft at managing and working with lots of different personalities and leaders and very complicated projects," says Mitchell, who met Puryear as a client 10 years ago.

## New Opportunities

Working for a global company that has grown into a workforce of 19,000 employees was a big switch from being an entrepreneur, but Puryear was drawn to the blank slate of the new role. "Health care is a dynamic field, and it's obviously very important to deliver services in health care to patients who need them. There's a real mission in the work," she says.

Her current role as VP of organizational development and chief talent officer at Hospira Inc. encompasses performance management, talent management, succession planning, learning programs, corporate culture, engagement and diversity.

She sees organizational development as occurring on three levels: the individual level (including performance management and learning), the team level

(including creating high-performing groups and preparing leaders to head up teams) and the enterprise level (which involves engagement and culture).

One of the major initiatives Puryear has spearheaded at Hospira is Ignite: Spark the Fire Within, an employee awareness campaign designed to highlight the company's learning value proposition. The campaign was launched in 2010 and now includes grants that employee teams can apply for to meet a learning and development need, as well as a career development toolkit to assist individual employees in managing their careers. The initiative is aimed at building excitement and understanding about the learning and development programs offered at Hospira and for its organizational development, performance improvement and career development offerings.

"The ultimate goal of Ignite is to engage employees to be accountable for their own careers and to understand that all of this programming is of value to them," Puryear says.

And to Hospira.

The strategy is to drive individual performance and engagement and ultimately business results. "If everyone ups their game, it is going to drive value for the company," Puryear explains.

Skills building and leadership development are a natural fit for someone who's a change agent at heart, says Puryear's longtime friend Nancy Sims.

"She's a big-picture thinker, and she has always looked at how change can affect organizations," Sims says.

Instead of pushing mandatory learning programs, Puryear has relied on word-of-mouth to drive interest in learning opportunities at Hospira. Her programs for directors, called Leading@

## Notes and Quotes

**Biggest challenge:** "Finding enough hours in the day to embrace all the opportunities, personally and professionally, to advance my growth and development, and that of others."

**How she describes herself:** "I'm fundamentally a builder, not a maintenance person. I like a blank slate."

**Personal:** Single; lives in Chicago.

**Diversions:** Scuba diving, traveling, spending time with family.

**Connections:** DrPam@JoinDrPam.com.



Hospira and [LeadingGrowth@Hospira](#), are in high demand. More than 12,000 employees have participated in the development programs Puryear has introduced.

Although she isn't overly concerned about metrics for the programs, Puryear does see evidence that they are delivering return on investment. "The metric I look at is, if we offer workshops, do people come?" (And do business leaders within the company want to make the investment to send their people?)

### **Customer-Centric Focus**

Puryear says one reason for the success of Hospira's learning programs is that course ideas often come from the company's business leaders themselves. Her emphasis on what customers want is reminiscent of her days as a consultant—a role where you have to lay out solutions and trust that the client takes the advice. "We're not HR Inc. This is Hospira Inc. It's not about HR. It's about what can HR do to enable the business to be successful," Puryear says.

Obstacles to organizational learning include scarce time and money, so collaboration with business leaders is especially important, she says. Her experience drumming up business and listening to clients as a consultant has been valuable in shaping her approach to developing Hospira's learning strategy.

"Trying to get to the root of what causes pain in a consumer-centric focus is what I bring to the job," Puryear says.

When a manufacturing executive asked her to look at workplace culture in the plants, she developed a comprehensive culture transformation program that has been her focus for the past two and a half years. Part of the project includes workshops for employees called [MakingADifference@Hospira](#) that focus on how to lead people to develop effective behaviors that drive value for the company. Puryear reinforces those objectives with half-day

sessions she calls “booster shots” that remind attendees of the company’s goals and strategy.

**A Lifelong Learner**

Puryear’s professional efforts are backed up by her personal willingness to keep learning. “She’s not an individual who becomes complacent. She’s all about continuous learning and skills building,” says Sims, president and CEO of the Robert Toigo Foundation in Oakland, Calif., a nonprofit that offers fellowships to minorities interested in financial services careers. Recalling the years when Puryear consulted for the foundation, Sims says she would shake her head in wonder each time Puryear came in telling of her plans to embark on some new project, like learning to scuba dive.

Puryear also sets an example as an HR leader by modeling a healthy balance between her personal and professional life. She takes time to travel and be with her close-knit family and friends. Whether it’s a work trip that leaves her extra days to explore the area or a diving trip to Fiji, Puryear loves to soak up different cultures and explore the world. Her father, who taught entrepreneurship and management at Baruch College of the City University of New York, spent part of his career as an executive at the Ford Foundation. His work provided Puryear with opportunities to nurture her passion for travel from a young age.

Puryear’s father also instilled in her the confidence to apply her talents to what interests her.

Even before returning to school to earn a Ph.D., Puryear was on a learning quest. Curiosity about color and lighting led her to spend evenings working toward a certificate from the University of California, Berkeley, in architecture and interior design. Today, her Chicago condominium is filled with colorful walls and a carefully curated personal art collection.

“I have a creative mindset. I don’t think I do things the way everyone else does them,” Puryear says. “In the business world, a creative mindset sometimes helps me innovate new ideas or better solutions to address business needs.” **HR**

Tamara Lytle is a freelance writer in the Washington, D.C., area.

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