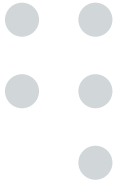# Executive Interview

with **Jodi Petersen**
VP of Strategy & Implementation Services
Chronus

BRIDGING THE LEADERSHIP GAP: HOW
STRATEGIC MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS
TRANSFORM ORGANIZATIONS IN 2025

About **Chronus**

Chronus is a purpose-driven development platform that enables top organizations to build productive workforces through impactful mentoring programs and employee communities. Chronus offers tailored solutions for companies tackling disengagement, attrition, stalled development and poor workplace connections. The Chronus platform scales mentoring and community programs (such as ERGs, BRGs, affinity groups and beyond) that align with organizational goals and employee growth with features like:

- A proprietary Purpose Assessment
- MatchIQ® technology
- Custom dashboards and reporting
- Seamless integrations

Chronus empowers companies like Amazon, T-Mobile, PNC, Harvard University and American Nurses Association to drive lasting, meaningful results.

About **Jodi Petersen**

As Vice President of Customer Experience, Jodi leads a team of professionals whose daily mission is to partner with Chronus customers to achieve their mentorship-driven goals; customers are at the heart of everything the team does. Jodi brings extensive corporate experience and a proven track record in creating and leading successful mentoring programs.

She founded MentorStrat after developing and implementing strategies for a FORTUNE® 50 mentoring program. Her achievements include securing a place on Diversity Inc's list of Top Companies for Mentoring and being named Mentoring Champion of the Year by a leading mentor software partner in 2021.
Jodi has a BS in Communication Sciences and Disorders from Northwestern University, and an MBA in Business Management from California Pacific University.

Host: **Rachel Cooke**

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences, and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 20+ years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research and Performance Improvement industries.

Q **RACHEL**

What are some of the biggest challenges that you're seeing right now in leadership or that you think companies will face in 2025?

A **JODI**

I think it's sort of an unprecedented year. We started seeing a lot of shifts with COVID, shifting the workforce to work at home. It fundamentally shifted the leadership dynamics. Some organizations have adapted well to it. Some are still emerging and adapting. Going into 2025, leaders face companies coming back in office or having hybrid work environments. That's a different leadership dynamic.

Emerging technologies like AI, trying to balance leveraging these technologies for efficiencies while maintaining human-centered leadership is a tricky balance. When ChatGPT first came out, my daughter's high school blocked access within the building to prevent cheating. I remember telling my husband, "I think this is the future of work and the school needs to evolve to teach students how to leverage it responsibly."

We have four, in some regards five generations in the workforce now. It's unprecedented having so many generations. You have generations born in technology who haven't known anything different, and generations like mine where this was all new at some point. For leaders today, figuring out how to balance that multi-generational workforce and leverage technology to foster collaboration is important.

Companies and leaders today need to think strongly about executive succession planning and role-based succession planning. When the boomer generation leaves the workforce, they're taking institutional knowledge with them. How can we prepare those next leaders for key roles, and what part does technology play?

Q **RACHEL**

Looking at leaders and poor leadership, what would you say are consequences that companies will face based on poor leadership in today's environment?

A **JODI**

Poor or unprepared leadership can lead to lack of alignment of goals across departments or with overall objectives of the organization. This causes teams to struggle with execution, innovation, or moving forward.

Poor leadership erodes trust with employees, demotivates them, and causes them not to be as productive. When you think about the expression "people don't leave companies, they leave leaders," Gallup estimated one trillion dollars a year in the US alone is due to voluntary turnover, much attributed to poor leadership. It results in real dollar impacts when leaders are not prepared or aligned with organizational goals.

Q **RACHEL**

We talked about coaching and mentorship. Where does that fit?

JODI

It's been interesting to see how mentorship and coaching has evolved to be integral. Traditional mentoring used to be inaccessible to everyone, reserved for high-level executives, taking someone under my wing to be the next me. Now we know employees are more successful if we help them be the best versions of themselves. That's where mentorship comes in.

When embedding mentoring and coaching with traditional leadership development programs like core learning courses and workshops, blending with experiential learning like hands-on projects and job shadowing, and adding mentorship — that's where magic happens. You get real-time feedback personalized to where you are on your development journey.

I believe leadership development starts day one in an organization. A healthy leadership pipeline starts with onboarding, helping early career employees build foundational skills, identifying high-potential talent, and starting leadership development aligned with your framework. Personalized mentoring and coaching programs can meet both collective organizational goals and individual needs in moments that matter.

RACHEL

In our research, when we survey HR, learning and talent priorities, coaching and mentoring was reported by almost 70% as an area of priority for competencies, professionals, and leadership development. It shows how critical it is for leaders to develop and have the skills to coach and tools to support it.

JODI

We've worked with organizations where mentorship was more of a feel-good initiative that employees asked for. It wasn't activated as a strategic lever to meet organizational objectives. Those are the first programs cut when budgets get tight.

We're trying to help our customers understand that a strategically designed program to meet specific needs for employee groups along the leadership journey isn't just a feel-good initiative. It should be embedded into organizational culture and delivers compelling ROI when done correctly. At Chronus, I help organizations design the right program and provide technology to help them scale.

At the excellence conference, several people running mentorship programs said scaling was their problem because they were doing it manually. A little technology can help remove administrative lift so programs can scale, and program managers can focus on alignment with organizational objectives.

RACHEL

Going back to your mentoring tool blending with learning experience, can you expand on how that works together?

JODI

We're taking an employee purpose-driven connection approach with our tool and programs. Whether supporting an ERG, mentorship programs within ERGs, or leadership programs, we help you understand if your program aligns to business objectives

or problems you're trying to solve.

For example, if you have a retention problem and think mentorship can help — absolutely it can. But how you design and recruit into that program matters for outcomes. Organizations often send mass emails, but the most engaged people are the ones who come to connectivity programs anyway. If you want impactful programs, you need to find less-engaged people critical to retain — skills or employees that wouldn't come from just an email announcement. You need to strategically recruit them.

For the most part, people who join voluntarily aren't going to leave anyway. To get impacts, be strategic about invitations. I like to help companies think about smaller strategic programs to do specific things in their organization. When I ran enterprise-wide mentoring for my previous company, we had 60+ programs running — smaller niche programs meant to do certain things with really good success.

You can be specific about who you're bringing in, like identifying high-potential employees in talent reviews and aligning them with leadership competencies. That development looks different than a director trying to move into an executive role — they need different skills. Our technology supports these programs, matches people in mass, and guides them through the experience.

Sometimes mentorship programs without structured guidance after matching become just coffee chats or get abandoned. We create structure along the journey, balancing subject matter expertise with technology to create impactful programs.

Q RACHEL

I like how you pointed out creating smaller niche programs to target those not necessarily outreaching for opportunities. That's such a large population — if you look at high potentials, they're maybe 10% of the workplace. You can make such a difference in the larger population. You don't want to ignore high potentials, but you'll connect with them at a higher level, while you need a targeted approach for the larger population. You can retain more of this population and motivate them to achieve more, giving greater return on investment.

A JODI

100%. On a scale of 1 to 10, your 9s and 10s will stay, your 1s and 2s will leave anyway. It's your 3s through 8s that are the bulk of your employees. If they're disengaged or unmotivated, that's where the opportunity is — bring them in, help them develop personalized plans, figure out career goals.

That's where you make big impacts in retention, engagement, productivity that translates into real dollars. The expense to replace an employee is about two-thirds of their annual salary. You're spending that, plus paying the new person, plus onboarding time before they're productive. We help you think about different populations, their needs, and how to develop something that works for them specific to your organization.

Every organization has its own culture and unique needs. The trick is aligning them so

both company and individuals succeed. Then you're building that leadership pipeline for the future.

Q RACHEL

People often leave too soon without knowing their value, potential, or what they could achieve. When individuals jump every few years, you wonder if they're achieving enough or making a difference. Sometimes self-selection or company decisions are necessary, but better structure for developing, engaging, and retaining leads to better retention and performance. Is there anything else about ROI you want to point out?

A JODI

It used to be one person, one career — you'd stay at a job forever with mutual loyalty. Now it's one person, many careers mentality. People shift away from their first job or major. When someone wants to pivot their career, they don't feel they can do it within their current organization because of their established persona. So they jump ship to reinvent themselves.

If through mentorship and coaching you can help people pivot careers, identify transferable skills, and do skills-forward resume writing and interviewing, they can pivot within your organization. They'll be happier, more well-rounded, and continue bringing value because you helped them get where they wanted to be. Mentorship is effective in this because it's personalized to where you're trying to go.

Q RACHEL

We've seen that in our research about job rotation for talent mobility, retention, and engagement. It gives ability to have different perspectives and understanding of the business from different angles. More diversity of thought and experience - geography or function. It might not be advancing but shifting laterally. However, over time, if you want to move into higher positions, it gives greater opportunity because you have deeper business understanding.

A JODI

Absolutely. Your overall business acumen improves from different experiences. When I pivoted my career, I worked with my mentor on understanding sometimes you need to go parallel before moving up. Let's talk about sacrifices you're making to get where you ultimately want. Those are learnings and conversations you wouldn't get from a class on career pivoting — they're personalized conversations with a coach or mentor.

I worked with a healthcare company that needed nursing informatics roles. They asked nurses to get this degree, but when they applied for these jobs internally, they weren't getting hired, so they were leaving. We created an intentional mentorship program and found they weren't getting hired because they didn't have data analysis experience and were interviewing as nurses, not talking about their new skills.

We paired them with data analysts and scientists so they could learn to talk about

their skills in a way to get jobs. It was wildly successful — they retained the remaining people they'd invested in and stopped the pipeline leak. It was a nuanced need, but that social learning aspect made it successful.

Q RACHEL

That's fascinating. The degree isn't the end-all — you have to tie it together with what they're looking for and how to describe your skills better. That doesn't come naturally for many people. You could be the smartest with all skills but need that next layer — emotional intelligence or communication. Coaching can be powerful in helping you communicate and connect.

A JODI

It helps uncover your motivation and best self, giving guidance to get where you want to go. In panel discussions with mentors and mentees, it's amazing to watch. They talk about success achieving goals, but overwhelmingly people say mentoring gives them confidence. People get emotional, talk about their mentor becoming a household name, using skills learned in their families. It's more than work-related - it can be life-changing when done well.

I tell mentors to talk about failures as much or more than successes, because that's how someone really learns — "I faced that situation, it was unsuccessful, but I failed forward, learned by doing" — that's the momentum we want in leadership development.

Q RACHEL

Do you have any lasting advice for companies or teams that haven't started?

A JODI

The two top reasons mentoring programs fail are lack of alignment with organizational objectives and lack of executive buy-in. Without that sponsorship, programs won't be seen as critical and are often cut when tough decisions are made. Spend time on those two things before even thinking about program design.

For leadership development, start small and scale. But one caution: People often use an MVP or pilot mentality and cut corners in program design, making it unscalable. Think about it as starting small then scaling a well-designed program rather than rapidly implementing something not well-thought-out that doesn't bring the ROI you promised executive sponsors.

Brandon Hall Group
EXCELLENCE AT WORK

Here are some ways to listen to the interview on Brandon Hall Group's Excellence at Work Podcast:

iTunes   Spotify   YouTube

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With more than 10,000 clients globally and more than 30 years of delivering world-class research and advisory services, Brandon Hall Group™ is focused on developing research that drives performance in emerging and large organizations, and provides strategic insights for executives and practitioners responsible for growth and business results.

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