



A CURATED RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared by  
CENTER FOR WOMEN AND BUSINESS AT BENTLEY UNIVERSITY

# Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networks: The Power and Value of Professional Connections



**BENTLEY**  
UNIVERSITY

Gloria Cordes Larson  
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and Business

## About the Gloria Cordes Larson Center for Women and Business (CWB)

*Advancing women and workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion.*

The CWB provides thought leadership and training on critical diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. CWB facilitators lead hundreds of sessions with businesses worldwide, providing knowledge and tools to foster inclusive organizations.

Our dynamic programs focusing on workplace inclusion range from strategic sessions for senior leaders to hands-on workshops for emerging professionals. Topics include:

- Corporate Culture, Unconscious Bias, and Inclusive Leadership
- Allyship, including Men in Partnership to Advance Women
- Building Confidence and Overcoming Unseen Barriers
- The Role of Courageous Conversations
- Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networks
- Talent Pipeline Issues from Entry Level to the Boardroom
- The Impact of Intersectionality
- Authentic Leadership and Team Development
- Effective Negotiations
- Workplace Flex and Parental Leave
- Taking Employee Resource Groups to the Next Level
- Developing Diversity and Inclusion Metrics
- The Multigenerational Workforce—Issues and Impacts

# About This Report

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The Gloria Cordes Larson Center for Women and Business (CWB) at Bentley University has compiled this report based on a literature review and synthesis of current practical research and media coverage on the role of mentorship, sponsorship, and networks in today's professional landscape. What exactly are these professional connections, and how do they differ? What is the significance of such initiatives for junior employees, senior executives, and organizations, and what challenges in today's workplace can they address?

In addition to examining these questions, we summarize expert advice for individuals and organizations seeking to develop, maximize, and sustain mentorship, sponsorship, and networking relationships and programs.

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**“A mentor gives career support and advice; a sponsor uses his/her political capital to advocate for the protégé. More specifically, a sponsor...believes in his/her protégé and goes out on a limb on the protégé’s behalf.”<sup>1</sup>**

–Kathy Caprino, Women’s Career and Personal Success Coach, Ellia Communications

## DEFINING THE BASICS

Center for Talent Innovation founder and CEO Sylvia Ann Hewlett describes a **mentor** as someone who gives valuable career support and advice, builds self-esteem, and provides a sounding board. He or she has the time and desire to aid the beneficiary in self-assessment and “blue-sky thinking,” and is often considered a role model.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally, the benefits flow primarily to the mentees, since their mentors help “because they like you, or because you remind them of themselves.”<sup>3</sup> However, the mutual benefits of the mentoring relationship are increasingly noted in the literature, including reciprocal learning and deriving personal satisfaction from helping another person achieve her potential and making that individual “feel needed, significant, and enjoyed.”<sup>4</sup>

**Sponsors** have a voice at decision-making tables, champion their protégés for promotions and critical opportunities when they are not in the room, and provide “air cover” for the less experienced individual to take risks. Sponsors may also make introductions to senior leaders, promote visibility, and provide critical feedback. In return, the protégé repays the sponsor’s investment by achieving exceptional results that reflect well on him or her.<sup>5&6</sup>

Like a mentor, the sponsor takes an interest in one’s professional success, but generally for less benevolent reasons: a senior individual’s investment in a protégé’s career also advances his or her own career or goals – the benefits always flow both ways.

A **protégé** is a high potential employee who brings value to his or her sponsor or mentor. Protégés outperform, demonstrate loyalty, and contribute a distinct personal brand. When we use the term mentee in this report, we are referring specifically to an individual who is advised, trained, or counseled by a mentor.<sup>7</sup> The roles of mentee, protégé, mentor, and sponsor can blend, and a single individual can wear multiple hats [See Figure 1].

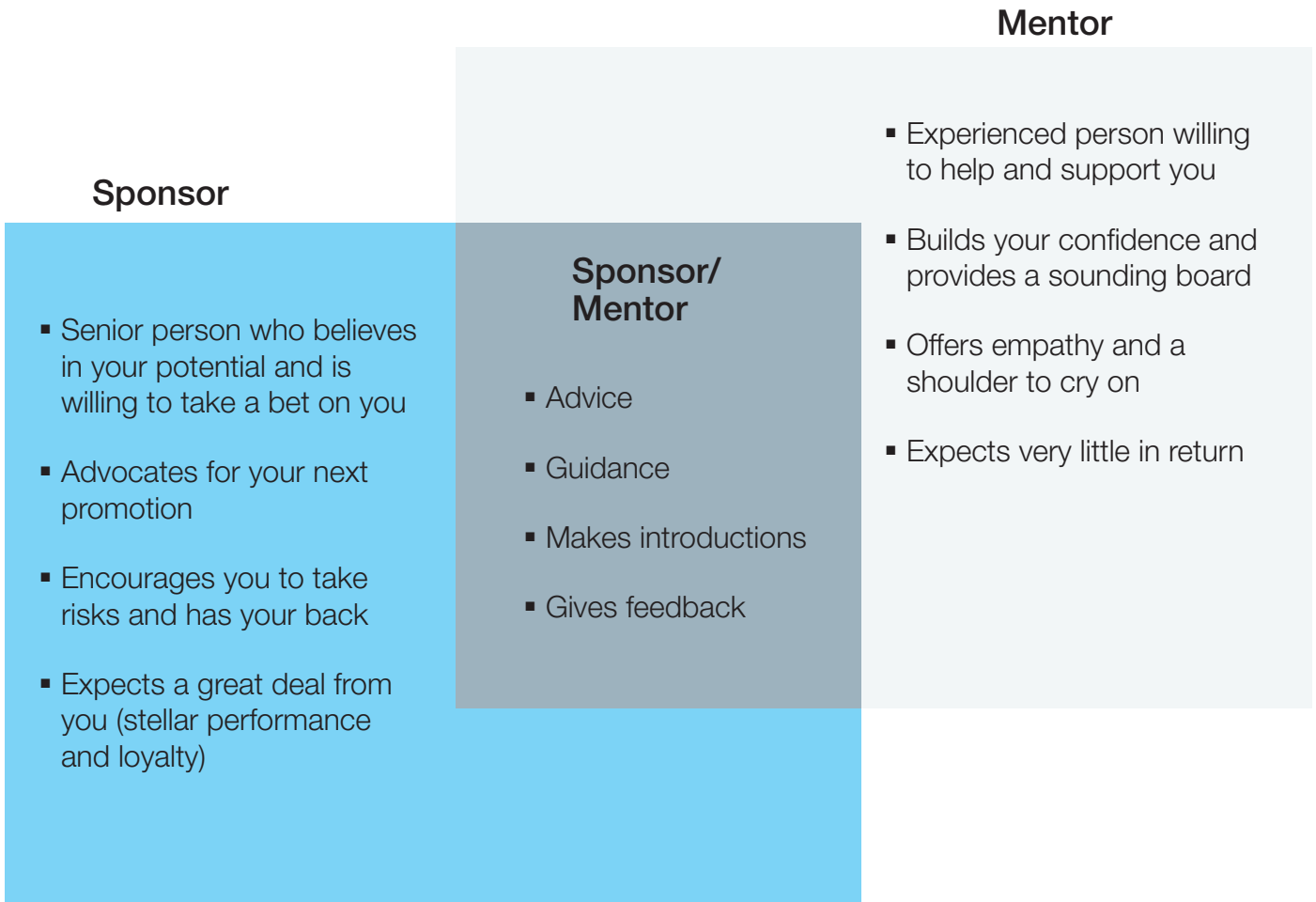
And finally, **professional networks** are the communities of people with whom one interacts over the course of a career. Networks can include friends, family, coworkers, classmates, industry leaders, and acquaintances. When it comes to career advancement, the most powerful networks are those a person nurtures and continuously expands, through formal networking events, recreational activities, volunteer work, and engagement that provides two-way professional value.

### Is sponsorship more important than mentorship?

Mentorship and sponsorship come in many different forms, each with its own application and merit. In current discourse, mentorship sometimes takes a backseat to sponsorship, but a thorough review of the literature indicates that both are essential and work best in concert.<sup>8&9</sup> In fact, sponsorship can grow from mentorship, as well-placed mentors may choose to sponsor a mentee for promotions or high-profile assignments.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 1

## Sponsor versus Mentor



Source: Hewlett, Sylvia Ann. *Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor: The New Way to Fast-Track Your Career*. Harvard Business Review Publishing Corporation, 2013. Page 21.

## THE CASE FOR MENTORSHIP, SPONSORSHIP, AND NETWORKS

While the power of professional connections has been harnessed for years, the importance of intentional mentoring, sponsoring, and networking has more recently moved to the forefront for organizations and professionals navigating their careers. Harvard Business Review notes that in managing today’s winding career paths, the need for mentoring is greater than ever.<sup>11</sup> And for women and minorities, such relationships can have significant impacts on workplace experience and career success.

### Pipeline, Pay, and Promotion

Mentorship and sponsorship, both formal and informal, have become recognized as a powerful talent development tool among organizations dedicated to moving the needle on gender pipeline, pay, and promotion issues. Why?

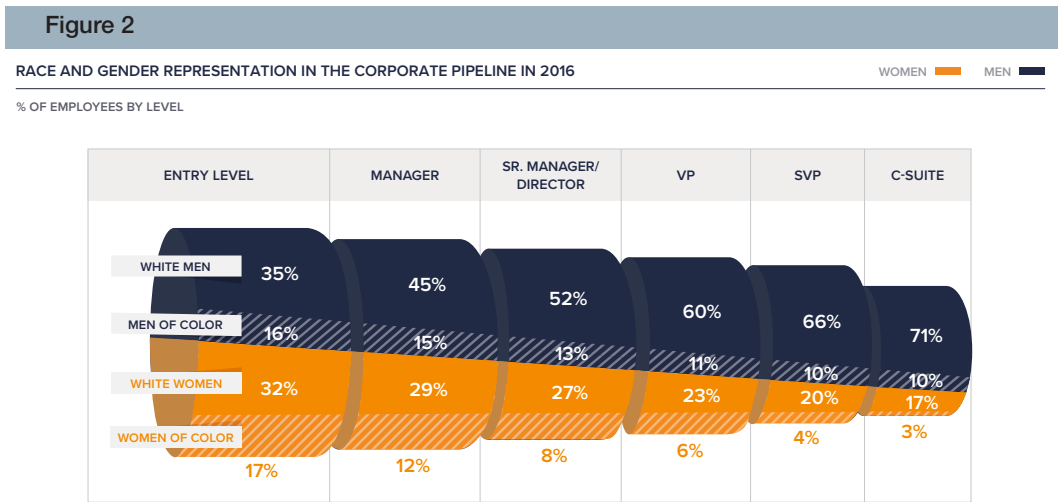
- Companies continue to lose women relative to men at every stage in the pipeline and women in leadership positions are still a minority. As of June 2017, only 32 Fortune 500 CEOs – 6.4 percent – were women.<sup>12</sup> While this increased from 21 female CEOs in 2016, the senior leadership pipeline remains narrow. In 2016, only 19 percent of Fortune 500 executive officers were women.<sup>13</sup>

- Research demonstrates that equal access to effective sponsorship for men and women is one way to address the male-female achievement gap. Catalyst found that, “Men’s ‘mentors’ are actually more senior, more influential, and have access to a wider network than women’s mentors. In other words, men’s ‘mentors’ are often really sponsors, and that is the critical difference...when women have sponsors, women are just as likely as men to be promoted.”<sup>14</sup>

- The data suggests women with sponsors are 27 percent more likely than those without sponsors to seek a raise and 22 percent more likely to seek ‘stretch assignments’ that build their leadership experience.<sup>15</sup>

### Diverse Populations: Where Mentors and Sponsors Matter Most

It is well established that women drop out of the corporate pipeline at higher rates than men, and the statistics for women of color are even worse. The McKinsey/LeanIn.Org 2016 *Women in the Workplace* report found that women of color make up just 3 percent of C-suite executives, compared to 17 percent for white women [See Figure 2]. The same study found that women of color perceive their workplace as less fair and inclusive.<sup>16</sup>



Source: Lean In and McKinsey & Company. *Women in the Workplace 2016*. Page 8.

Distinct from women as a group or men of color as a group, women of color face more double standards and negative stereotyping that can impede their career progression. They report lower levels of satisfaction with opportunities for advancement in their organizations.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, compared to white women, minority women are far more likely to have mentors who lack influence. With decreased access to influential mentors, these women often fall behind in the pipeline. The disadvantage becomes obvious at promotion time, when high-ranking mentors often act as sponsors by promoting their mentees for stretch roles and assignments.<sup>18</sup>

While mentoring programs serving all women or all minorities are a step in the right direction, further tailoring is required to successfully support and advance women of color and foster an inclusive culture. Studies show that diverse women with influential mentors are more likely to feel committed to their organizations and are less likely to leave.<sup>19</sup>

## Networks and Gender

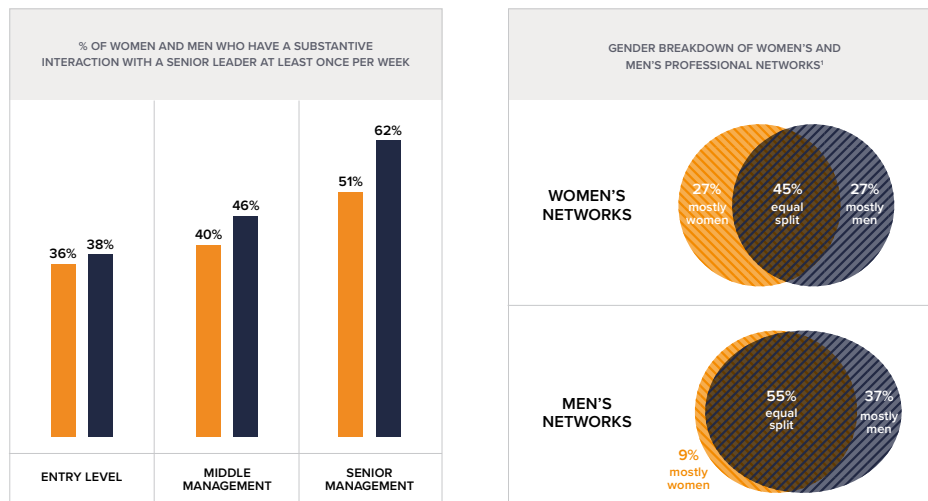
Who you know matters – and the evidence is consistent. Industry-wide, about 80 percent of job openings are filled via word-of-mouth.<sup>20</sup> A 2015 McKinsey & Company survey showed that the majority of men and women believe their professional network “has directly helped them obtain jobs, get promoted, and have access to key assignments and opportunities.”<sup>21</sup> But when it comes to professional networks, women and men find themselves in very different positions.

Research shows that men have predominantly male networks and women have largely female or mixed networks [See Figure 3]. Since men are more likely to hold senior positions, this means women may be at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing high-level mentorship and sponsorship.<sup>22</sup> This trend only intensifies the need for women and organizations to employ strategies like mentoring and sponsoring, and for women to embrace networking strategies like those discussed in the “Building and Leveraging Networks” section of this report. It also emphasizes the importance of engaging both men and women as sponsors and mentors in order to maximize access to the power derived from differing networks and varied relationships.

Figure 3

DIFFERENT ACCESS TO SENIOR LEADERS AND DIFFERENT NETWORKS

WOMEN ■ MEN ■



Source: Lean In and McKinsey & Company. *Women in the Workplace 2016*. Page 13.

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## Women Need Actionable Feedback

Research shows that women too often receive feedback that is sugarcoated. A 2016 study from Stanford's Clayman Institute for Gender Research and Center for the Advancement of Women's Leadership found that professional feedback for men was more likely to be correlated to business outcomes (60% for men versus 40% for women). Such dynamics hurt women at promotion time. Without documented business accomplishments, a manager is challenged in making the case for advancement. Conversely, if an objective is not attained, a lack of candid feedback deprives women of the opportunity to achieve the objective later.<sup>23</sup>

In addressing why we don't have more women leaders, Sheryl Sandberg explains, "Women are more likely to receive vague feedback they can't act on (such as, 'Good job' or 'Your speaking style can be off-putting')." <sup>24</sup> There are a number of factors that contribute to this phenomenon, including men's fear of making women cry or become emotional, as well as the assumption that women aren't as ambitious as their male peers.<sup>25</sup>

Mentors and sponsors should be aware of this dynamic and give honest input, even when it's uncomfortable to do so, and in order to solicit actionable feedback, mentees and protégés should ask specific questions about projects or challenges they face.<sup>26</sup>

**"When you get to the level where decisions are made about your career that are not just up to an individual manager, feedback from other leaders becomes crucial."<sup>27</sup>**

—Rosalind Hudnell, Vice President of Corporate Affairs and Former Chief Diversity Officer, Intel

## THE BENEFITS OF MENTORSHIP, SPONSORSHIP, AND NETWORKS

### Benefits for Individuals

Mentorship, sponsorship, and actionable networking are essential tools for professionals regardless of age, gender, industry, seniority, and function. Learning to maximize their power and use them in combination can provide invaluable benefits for one's career advancement and continued development.

The payoff of **sponsorship** for professional development is well established. Most available information focuses on its impact for younger professionals. Research conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) demonstrates that good sponsors set talented professionals on the "path to power and influence" via three main factors: pay raises, high profile assignments, and promotions.<sup>28</sup> This is significant because:

- Studies show that the majority of women (70 percent) and men (67 percent) are hesitant to ask their boss for a raise, and that sponsored women are more likely to request pay increases and stretch assignments than unsponsored women.<sup>29&30</sup>
- 70 percent of sponsored men and 68 percent of sponsored women report satisfaction with their pace of professional progression, while only 57 percent of their unsponsored peers report the same.<sup>31</sup> Despite this similarity, closer examination reveals key differences in the way sponsorship impacts women's career trajectories – mothers in particular. CTI studies found that "85 percent of mothers (employed full-time) who have sponsors stay in the game, compared to only 58 percent of those going it alone."<sup>32</sup>
- Harvard Business Review research goes so far as to conclude that promotion to top jobs *depends* on sponsorship.<sup>33</sup>



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**Mentorship**, too, has the power to transform careers. In a global 2015 study, Catalyst found that MBA graduates who had a mentor before starting their first post-MBA job received greater compensation and a higher-level position.<sup>34</sup> Another study indicated that in 2016, 61 percent of Millennials were in mentoring relationships. Among these, more than nine in ten Millennials reported receiving high quality advice from a mentor who was interested in their development, and 83 percent reported satisfaction with the mentoring relationship.<sup>35</sup>

**Networks** expose professionals to new ideas, delivering knowledge and support, expanding influence, and revealing opportunities.<sup>36</sup> Senior executive women, who have leveraged their connections to advance, use network and professional relationships to “...create opportunities and outlets for sounding off about career challenges.”<sup>37</sup> Harvard Business Review’s research report *The Sponsor Effect* reveals the relationship that can exist between sponsorship and networks: “Sponsorship...can in fact offer women the kind of springboard that compensates qualified women for their impaired access to...old-boy networks.”<sup>38</sup>

### Benefits for Mentors and Sponsors

While sponsorship is more of a two-way transaction than mentorship, both mentors and sponsors reap rewards and fulfillment from advancing another person’s career and development. In addition to personal satisfaction, senior executives report that “mentoring younger colleagues provides a window into the mind-set, challenges, pressures, and lifestyle of the younger workforce, allowing us to better understand them.”<sup>39</sup> Just as young professionals

need guidance from those above them, mature professionals benefit because younger colleagues help them remain relevant.<sup>40</sup>

Sponsors benefit from growing “reputational capital” when they champion high performing employees.<sup>39</sup> The Center for Talent Innovation found that white male leaders with protégés are 11 percent more satisfied with their own rate of advancement than leaders who do not sponsor high potential talent. The picture for leaders of color is clearer still, with sponsors in this group reporting 24 percent greater satisfaction with their career progress than those without a posse of protégés.<sup>42</sup>

### Benefits for Organizations

The business case for mentorship, sponsorship, and networking is clear. Building an inclusive pipeline, boosting retention and loyalty, and grooming diverse leaders all serve the bottom line, and employee development programs are fundamental to the cause.<sup>43</sup>

The Millennial workforce has brought with it a new trend of shortened tenure, as young professionals feel less loyal to companies and are more inclined to accept outside opportunities. Gallup reports that only half of Millennials plan to remain with their employer a year from now, compared to 60% of non-Millennials.<sup>44</sup> Organizations hoping to retain their younger employees should invest in mentorship and sponsorship programs, which have been shown to strengthen loyalty.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, “those intending to stay with their organization for more than five years are twice as likely to have a mentor (68 percent) than not (32 percent).”<sup>46</sup>

**“As someone who worked on Wall Street for a decade, I can attest that it can feel like you’re the first person to walk on the moon without other women to guide, inspire and push you. In these cases, the positive influence of a mentor is invaluable. It’s a gift that allows people to pay it forward, and those of us who have established success want to help others do the same.”<sup>47</sup>**

–Elle Kaplan, CEO and Founding Partner of LexION Capital Management

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## SPONSORSHIP, MENTORSHIP, AND NETWORKS: MORE THAN ONE FLAVOR

### Sponsorship Variations

Traditional sponsorship entails a formal relationship in which a senior influencer actively advocates for a less senior, high potential professional, opening doors to promotions, reach assignments, and powerful networks.<sup>48</sup>

Sponsoring relationships generally last about six years and span career transitions. However, a boss, senior colleague, or established acquaintance could engage in one-time sponsorship by advocating for an individual's internal or external professional opportunity, with or without the person's knowledge.<sup>49</sup>

An individual can also have multiple sponsors, thereby diversifying access to opportunities, viewpoints, and advocacy.<sup>50</sup>

### Mentorship Variations

Catalyst research indicates that when mentoring relationships are left to develop informally, women often encounter gender-based obstacles that keep them from reaping the rewards of mentorship, including decreased access to potential mentors.<sup>51</sup> Fortunately, formal mentoring can help to level the playing field. When curating mentoring matches for employees, organizations benefit from diverse pairing across boundaries such as gender, generation, professional seniority, and nationality/location.<sup>52</sup>

While challenging to implement, research shows that formal programs can have real benefits for organizations that focus on context. In order to make a measurable impact, mentoring and sponsoring must be part of a comprehensive development program that includes networking opportunities, talent evaluation, training, and succession management.<sup>53</sup>

Mentoring initiatives should be linked explicitly to career outcomes and – perhaps most critically – the culture must support it. [See *A Mentorship Culture* section on page 9.]

Formal and informal mentoring can include:

#### ■ Traditional One-on-One Mentoring

The most conventional form of mentoring in which a (typically) senior person acts as a role model and advisor to a junior person. According to Catalyst, this version is best for facilitating long-term relationships.<sup>54</sup>

#### ■ Peer Mentoring

A one-on-one relationship “between hierarchical peers whose roles may or may not vary by function and technical expertise.” This approach offers a more relaxed context to exchange knowledge and social support.<sup>55</sup>

#### ■ Mentoring Circles

A form of mentoring in which one mentor meets with a group of mentees. These are efficient from a personnel standpoint and closely mirror the work team structure.<sup>56</sup>

#### ■ Reverse or Reciprocal Mentoring

Involves a junior person mentoring a senior person, or mutual mentorship. This format helps senior leaders stay in touch with their younger workforce, maintain relevance, and broaden diverse perspectives. Areas of focus can include technology, social media, leadership, workplace trends, and more.<sup>57&58</sup>

#### ■ Developmental Networks/Multiple Mentors

A small group of contacts uniquely qualified to assist you in a specific area of development. A person can turn to the people in this mini network as she would a mentor, benefitting from multiple sources of input.<sup>59</sup>

### ■ One Minute Mentoring

Despite the established benefit of formal mentoring programs, mentoring does not always have to be a big commitment. In their 2017 book, *One Minute Mentoring*, Ken Blanchard and Claire Diaz-Ortiz make the case for mentorship in the form of brief but regular conversations.<sup>60</sup>

## Networks Variations

Like mentorship and sponsorship, networking is not one-size-fits-all. Managing three key types of networks, operational, developmental, and strategic, can provide a critical advantage.<sup>61</sup>

### ■ Operational Networks

Help employees navigate current responsibilities at work. Operational networks include the people employees rely on to successfully accomplish their work as well as the people who rely on them. These networks are organically created through day-to-day interactions but can also be expanded to add colleagues who could contribute to an individual's success.<sup>62</sup>

### ■ Developmental Networks

Enhance professional growth. Developmental networks, also known as personal networks, can include individuals from professional circles as well as from personal connections. Individuals in these networks provide advice and support focused on

personal growth and professional advancement.<sup>63</sup> They can be viewed as a "... personal board of directors."<sup>64</sup>

### ■ Strategic Networks

Focus on business possibilities for the future and who can help one get there. Effective strategic networks are based on relationships with individuals who are outside a person's day-to-day work yet have an understanding of the person's goals and interests. These relationship allows them to recognize trends and disruptions that could lead to new opportunities. These connections need to be intentionally created and actively cultivated.<sup>65</sup>

Strategic networking may be underutilized by women. Herminia Ibarra, Professor of Organizational Behavior at INSEAD Business School, conducted research indicating that this type of networking is most difficult for women for three reasons, namely, women's tendency to gravitate socially toward each other, their distinct separation of work and personal circles (in contrast to men's more integrated circles), and discomfort with what some perceive as "using people."<sup>66</sup>

To overcome these hurdles, women should focus on extending their networks outwards. Taking on side projects, engaging in extracurricular activities, or moderating panels are ways to intentionally yet naturally grow professional relationships.<sup>67</sup>

**Table 1 The Three Forms of Networking**

	Operational	Personal	Strategic
Location and Temporal Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contacts are mostly internal and oriented toward current demands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contacts are mostly external and oriented towards current and future potential interests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contacts are internal and external and orientated toward the future.</li> </ul>
Players and Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Key contacts are relatively nondiscretionary; they are prescribed by the task and organizational structure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contacts are mostly discretionary; it is not always clear who is relevant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Key contacts follow from the strategic context and the organizational environment but specific contacts are discretionary.</li> </ul>
Network Attributes and Key Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Depth: building strong working relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Breadth: reaching out to contacts who can make referrals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leverage: creating inside-outside links.</li> </ul>

Source: Ibarra, Herminia and Hunter, Mark. "How Leaders Create and Use Networks." *Harvard Business Review*, January 2007, [hbr.org/2007/01/how-leaders-create-and-use-networks](http://hbr.org/2007/01/how-leaders-create-and-use-networks).

# IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS: INSIGHT FOR ORGANIZATIONS

When developing formal programs within the workplace, a number of factors need to be taken into account – namely, creating a supportive culture, establishing structure, ensuring accountability through effective measurement, and avoiding common pitfalls. Note that this section reflects the reality that formal programs within organizations focus primarily on mentorship.

## A Mentorship Culture

As mentoring has evolved, the role of mentors and mentees has changed. A mentee may once have been a passive receiver of her mentor’s pearls of wisdom, but the paradigm is no longer a one-way transference. Today, mentorship is evolving not only to include previously outlined methods like reverse mentoring, but also to claim its place as part of a larger culture that organizations must manifest in order to remain competitive and inclusive. According to Lois Zachary, Ph.D., author of *The Mentor’s Guide*, building a mentoring culture is “the most important challenge” facing organizations today.<sup>68</sup>

What does a robust mentorship culture look like? Zachary describes it as a deliberate and ongoing focus on creating opportunities for both formal and informal mentoring throughout the organization. She explains, “Mentoring programs come and go; there’s a lack of sustainability there. But a mentoring culture will be supported and valued within the organization. Then, programs within that culture create a standard and consistency of mentoring practice that really works.”<sup>69</sup>

Organizations must establish the expectation that “everybody owns” the responsibility for sharing support and knowledge, and senior executives must work to ensure all employees feel motivated and safe. In this environment, mentees (as well as protégés and others seeking professional assistance) benefit from wider access to opportunities which aid their professional and personal goals, and this in turn builds a more capable, satisfied, and committed workforce.

## Creating a Mentoring Culture

At the Chubb Corporation, a mentoring culture was encouraged through multiple programs promoting company-wide work on diversity and inclusion. In addition to regular diversity training for all employees, Chubb partnered with Catalyst’s *Men Advocating Real Change (MARC)* initiative to engage male talent as allies.<sup>70</sup>

**“Today, there is a new paradigm of mentoring that’s demonstrating that it ‘takes a mentoring culture’ and multiple mentors to help multicultural women grow into successful CEOs, leaders, and business owners.”<sup>71</sup>**

–Diversity Woman

## Characteristics of Ineffective vs. Effective Formal Programs

The theme across successful mentoring and sponsoring programs is *structure* and *accountability*. By clearly setting expectations and consistently checking in, organizations set mentors and mentees up for success and increase the likelihood of a sustainable program [See Figure 4].

When setting up a program, important aspects to consider include cohort size, educating participants about expectations and objectives, and defining time commitment.<sup>72</sup> Programs must be tailored to the state and specific needs of the organization, which means that no two mentoring programs will look the same. “Many big mentorship efforts fail because they’re too

large to actually deliver the benefits they’re designed to. Even big tech companies like PayPal seem to prefer a constellation of more focused mentorship programs to just one huge, company-wide option.”<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, while women’s need for these programs is most stark, research shows that including men is essential. An interviewer in a 2012 McKinsey study explained, “Women-specific programs stigmatize women. We prefer to focus on excellent talent management—for both men and women.”<sup>74</sup>

Figure 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF <b>INEFFECTIVE</b> FORMAL MENTORING PROGRAMS	CHARACTERISTICS OF <b>EFFECTIVE</b> FORMAL MENTORING PROGRAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentor and mentee matching is ad-hoc, not based on assessment</li> <li>• Lacks formal goals or objectives</li> <li>• No clear time frame or time commitment required</li> <li>• No monitoring or check-ins</li> <li>• No accountability</li> <li>• No clear tie to business efforts exist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors and mentees matched based on skills/development needs</li> <li>• Formal goals are outlined and tracked</li> <li>• Minimum time commitments are designated</li> <li>• Formal process exists for monitoring the relationship</li> <li>• Both parties are held accountable; links to talent management exist</li> <li>• Links to business strategy, goals exist</li> </ul>

Source: Dinolfo, Sarah and Nugent, Julie. *Making Mentoring Work*. Catalyst, 2010. Page 1.

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## Strategies Used to Create Effective Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs

Deutsche Bank's *Accomplished Top Leaders Advancement Strategy (ATLAS)* addresses gender imbalance in senior leadership roles by pairing high-performing women with members of the firm's Executive Committee who then sponsor the women for senior positions.<sup>75</sup>

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Credit Suisse's *Reverse Mentoring: Engaging Generational Difference* program pairs senior leaders with junior talent to improve cross-generational and cross-level communication.<sup>76</sup>

Nationwide established its *Touch Point* program to "increase employee's exposure throughout the organization." Sponsorship pairings were intentionally made across gender, race, ethnicity, and other differences.<sup>77</sup>

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Citi's *Women Leading Citi* initiative matches high-potential women at the managing director level with male or female senior "advocates" who invest in their advancement and champion them for senior leadership opportunities.<sup>78</sup>

"Just as an organization might have a plan to increase shareholder value, it's critical to have a plan for increasing sponsorship. Without commitment and a plan from the outset, sponsorship is not going to get to a point where it can be effective for sponsors, their sponsorees and the organization...Tools are not going to make it happen until you actually have a change in thought process where people think this is part of what they have to do to be a successful executive."<sup>79</sup>

—Mike Fucci, Chairman of the Board, Deloitte

## Ensuring Accountability through Measurement

As with all diversity and inclusion initiatives, a commitment to tracking goals and outcome metrics is an important motivator and critical in determining program effectiveness. However, measuring mentorship programs can be challenging.

Certain quantitative measurements, like the number of mentoring pairs matched, are clear-cut. But broader goals, such as cultivating a more inclusive culture, are harder to assess. In order to successfully measure such goals, it can be helpful to identify and track related metrics that can point to outcomes in these areas.<sup>80</sup> Figure 5 below provides sample metrics.

**Figure 5**

Examples of Formal Mentoring Goals	Potential Related Metrics You Should Consider
Develop a diverse pipeline, ready for leadership	How many mentees from different employee groups (e.g., Latinas) are receiving important assignments?
Create a more globally or culturally aware workforce	How many mentoring participants have been placed in cross-region matches? How many pairs have specific mentee/mentor objectives about learning culturally-specific trends? Have these objectives been reached successfully?
Help retain talent	How many high performers or high potentials have been mentored, and how many of them have been retained compared to those who have not been mentored? (Comparison employees should be matched on as many other characteristics as possible.)

Source: Dinolfo, Sarah and Nugent, Julie. *Making Mentoring Work*. Catalyst, 2010. Page 7.

Qualitative measures such as surveys, focus groups, and interviews can be powerful in garnering critical insights about an organization’s mentoring, sponsoring, and networking programs and their impact on individuals and behavior. To assess employee perception, organizations can conduct climate surveys that gauge attitudes toward diversity, inclusion, trust, and equality, and host focus groups that examine these topics through discussions and interviews. When diversity and inclusion efforts are effective, such methods should demonstrate improvements over a baseline, including “decreased social distance and prejudiced thinking.”<sup>81</sup>

### Accountability for Sponsorship

Kimberly-Clark Corporation expects its senior leaders to sponsor high-potential employees through their own initiative and measure the impact during annual performance reviews. The senior executives’ success influences their merit increases and promotion. To get the highest marks for overall performance, they must have received the highest ratings for people development.<sup>82</sup>

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## Don't Miss the Mark

One of the biggest challenges organizations face is ensuring that commitment to mentorship extends through all levels; it is not enough to merely champion these initiatives at the top.

McKinsey research reveals a stark gap between the number of companies offering mentorship programs and those which women consider well implemented. Cited issues include waning enthusiasm from mentors and mentees after a short period, as well as some women's fear of association with "what some regard as positive-discrimination measures that undermine meritocracy."<sup>83</sup>

More recent research by InHerSight takes into account the feedback of over 90,000 women, in which they ranked their employers on 14 fixed metrics such as management opportunities, salary satisfaction, and mentorship programs. "Mentorship and sponsorship programs" was the lowest-rated factor of the 14 designated criteria.<sup>84</sup> Does this mean these programs aren't important? Far from it. The same research found that "a company's mentorship program is highly correlated with women's overall satisfaction and happiness at her company," and is therefore of high value.<sup>85</sup> Rather than eliminate imperfect programs, organizations would be wise to work harder at revamping them – and getting it right.



# NAVIGATING PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS: INSIGHT FOR INDIVIDUALS

In order to develop and leverage professional relationships, individuals need to understand how to identify champions, establish networks, and maintain these critical connections over time. Women also need to understand the most common challenges and the unique nature of male-female professional relationships.

## THE SEARCH

### When finding a mentor, it pays to look beyond the obvious.

In addition to immediate professional and personal networks, one should consider community groups and service organizations, some of which offer their own business mentoring programs.<sup>86</sup> While professional associations offer an opportunity to connect with someone in your field, forging a mentoring relationship across industry or departmental lines frees it from the evaluation and subtle hierarchical pressure that inevitably comes from working with someone within your department.<sup>87</sup>

### Find a mentor with knowledge and skills you don't already have.

Tammy Tibbetts, founder and president of She's The First, recommends finding someone outside of the company. "In my experience, those are the best mentors because you can be fully candid with them," she explains.<sup>88</sup> It is also wise to focus on finding someone with the expertise to complement the experience or knowledge you lack, rather than choosing someone you get along well with.<sup>89</sup>

### Before pitching a potential mentor, ask: Am I someone people want to mentor?

Workboard CEO Deidre Paknad notes that the relationship needs to feel like a good use of her energy since her time is limited. "When I'm mentoring

someone, I need to see where I can add value."<sup>90</sup> Before approaching someone to mentor you, be clear on what you want out of the relationship.<sup>91</sup>

### You do not find sponsorship – you earn it – and a sponsor finds you.<sup>92</sup>

While the mentoring relationship is driven by the mentee, sponsoring is driven by the sponsor, and the instigation will most likely follow suit. In finding a sponsor, leading with how you can help the other person is vital. Establish your reliability by performing and consistently exceeding expectations, both at work and in outside endeavors.

A sponsor is more likely to be someone within your organization, as 30-40 percent of sponsors are a direct manager and 20 percent happen to be your boss's boss.<sup>93</sup> Aspiring protégés shouldn't limit themselves to a single mentor and sponsor. Remaining open to multiple relationships only increases access to varied knowledge and advice.<sup>94</sup>

### Do women need male or female mentors?

The research on whether women are most successful with male or female mentors is not clear-cut, and in fact an argument can be made for each.

Some research indicates that women do best not to limit themselves to female mentors, and that it may even be in their best interest to find a man, particularly when working in a male-dominated industry. Given that most workplaces have more senior-level men, a male mentor may be able to confer greater "organizational legitimacy" and resources on his mentees – but not because of gender itself.<sup>95</sup> A 2015 study indicated that a mentor's level, not gender, had the greatest impact on career advancement.<sup>96</sup>

For women in STEM fields, however, studies paint a different picture. A University of Massachusetts

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study found that female students who were assigned women mentors had distinctly better results than those who were assigned male mentors, even though each group's mentorship structure and timeframe were the same.<sup>97</sup>

Of its subjects, the study notes, "One hundred percent of women with female mentors remained in engineering majors at the end of year one, compared with 82 percent with male mentors, and 89 percent without mentors."<sup>98</sup> Further studies show that when women are in a small minority in "achievement settings," having a female mentor can decrease feelings of alienation and support a sense of belonging.<sup>99</sup>

In a study by Harvard Business Review, 46 percent of women surveyed expressed a preference for male sponsors, citing men's superior networks as the reason. On the other hand, 31 percent of women in the same study felt that senior men were either unavailable or unwilling to mentor them, and 30 percent pointed to the potential for attraction in one-on-one male-female relationships as a roadblock to productivity.<sup>100</sup>

## **BUILDING AND LEVERAGING NETWORKS**

### **Make networking a daily priority.**

A Goldman Sachs partner stresses the importance of integrating networking into daily responsibilities. She recommends carving out 10 to 20 percent of working hours to connect and follow up with contacts.<sup>101</sup>

When connecting, always lead with the value you can offer to others. Britt Morgan-Saks, head of Artist Services at Spotify, recommends "being direct, but never pushy, arrogant, or overly aggressive. Don't

worry if you're the youngest person in the room with the least amount of professional experience. If you bring a unique perspective and speak up, you're a valuable asset."<sup>102</sup>

### **Focus on connecting, not quid pro quo.**

One of the biggest obstacles for women in growing their networks is an aversion to quid pro quo interaction – a distaste that most men do not share.<sup>103</sup> Sallie Krawcheck, CEO and co-chair of Ellevest and founder of the Ellevest Network, wants women to know "It's OK to be transactional...It doesn't always have to be a meal or a golf game."<sup>104</sup>

Many high-powered women advise approaching networking as "connecting," thereby leveraging a typically dominant female strength and downplaying any discomfort associated with common negative perceptions of networking.<sup>105</sup>

### **Effective networking is not gender specific.**

The psychosocial differences between men and women are a common topic in networking literature. One prevailing perception is that women's lack of social aggression disadvantages them in the networking realm. While dynamics such as the pressure to walk a narrow line between femininity and assertiveness certainly play into women's professional experience, academic researchers and businesswomen agree that the gender stereotype argument is generally overemphasized.<sup>106&107</sup>

Studies confirm that women are not afraid to network, however, their searches may suffer in comparison to men's due to their predominantly female contacts and lesser access to top, often male, executives.<sup>108</sup>

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## Get beyond intrinsic gender dynamics.

Some of the challenges most cited in mentoring or sponsoring situations deal with intrinsic gender dynamics present in male-female relationships. Among them is some men's fear that they will say something "improper," which leads them to feel more comfortable interacting with men.<sup>109</sup>

Also of concern for some men is the fear of sexual tension or outside misinterpretation of a mentorship relationship as inappropriate.<sup>110</sup> Experts discourage this mentality, claiming that the risk of sexual dynamics complicating male-female sponsoring relationships is too easily accepted as a deterrent, and that professionals should focus instead on trying to prevent or manage it.<sup>111</sup>

Mentoring consultant Ida Abbott advises male sponsors to "Be self-aware, recognize any assumptions or biases that might cause you to bypass women in favor of sponsoring men. Be more purposeful about identifying women with talent, excellence, and drive, even if the women's styles and approaches are unconventional or different than the masculine behaviors all-too often associated with leadership."<sup>112</sup>

## MAINTAINING A MENTORING OR SPONSORING RELATIONSHIP

Effective mentoring and sponsoring relationships are based on open communication, mutual trust, and commitment. Some key recommendations to fostering strong, constructive relationships include:

- Listen to advice and feedback – even when it may be difficult to hear. In order to get productive insight, be candid about what you would like to achieve and the obstacles you are experiencing.<sup>113</sup>
- Report back on your progress. Your mentor or sponsor will likely feel more invested if she can see the positive impact she is having on your career.  
114&115
- Recognize that your mentor's time is valuable. Come to meetings prepared to ask thoughtful questions and discuss the challenges you are facing.<sup>116</sup> Set an agenda before the meeting, stay focused on one or two topics, and try to come away with a few specific actions that you will initiate.<sup>117</sup>
- Build trust by being reliable and doing great work. Often, mentors are potential sponsors. Show that you are a valuable, dependable contributor.<sup>118</sup>
- Seek ways to give back to your mentor or sponsor. The strongest relationships are reciprocal and mutually beneficial. If appropriate, return the favor through reverse mentoring.<sup>119</sup>
- Set reasonable expectations. Mentors may not always have pertinent advice and sponsors may not always be in a position to advocate for you.<sup>120</sup>
- Finally, don't forget to express gratitude!<sup>121</sup>

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