



Business Skill Development

Mentorship Opportunities for Career Women: A Worthwhile Investment

By Lindsay Kessler



Why Mentor?

A professional mentor has the same goals as a coach, a personal trainer, a teacher or a parent – to give their peer the confidence, skills, and motivation to

succeed in life. Whether the area of interest is fitness, education or career based, a mentorship opportunity is a valuable experience often overlooked particularly by professionals looking to increase their knowledge base. Whether it's starting a new job, looking to expand professional horizons, or maybe switching fields all together, consider researching an organization or coworker to work with in hopes of optimizing your abilities.

According to Peg Hendershot, Director of Career Vision, today's career women should seek both an internal and external mentor to help them develop professionally. Internally, this mentor could be an established colleague, or another person within your field that has already succeeded in their specialization. Externally, women can take advantage of professional associations and online resources to encourage further progress.

Non-Traditional Women

Especially for women in non-traditional roles with jobs in the trades, engineering and construction industries, utilizing a mentorship is a must. Women can find that speaking with others in their same situation to be extremely powerful. Women's career situations vary from professional hurdles to juggling family life, and finding someone successful and established can be the link between just getting by and being successful. This go-to person doesn't have to be a woman, but it's often helpful if it is. Since men and women have different approaches to the working world, some women find it easier to connect with someone of the same gender. If it's a primarily male-dominated workforce, finding another experienced

Developing the Relationship

1. Look for someone successful within your organization with the skills you'd like to develop.
2. Look for a role model (ie: someone you see with excellent time management skills, customer relation strategies, technical abilities you don't have)
3. If someone within your company doesn't exist, examine other corporations with those abilities you want to work on in a field you're interested in.
4. Explicitly define what you're looking for when asking someone to be a coach. Be up front with what you're looking for regarding time commitment, type of mentorship, specific skills...
5. Assess your weaknesses with their strengths. Allow that difference to guide your mentorship goals.
6. Encourage honest feedback so you can gain constructive criticism. Ask for help!
7. The key to successful mentoring is communication. Set up formal meeting times as often as every week to every month, depending on your deadlines. Think out questions ahead of time and make the most of your conversation.
8. Your network is your most valuable asset. It's a small world so try not to burn bridges. An opportunity like this can expand your set of connections with other people and corporations. If for some reason a relationship doesn't work out, try to end on a positive note.

woman might be difficult so look at another corporation or an on-line source. However, being mentored by a man might allow insight on his perspective of the business and how he's established himself within the company. Either way, realize that mentorship is a two-way street and both mentor and peer can gain from the experience.

Career Vision is a personal service program dedicated to helping individuals make great career decisions based on each person's unique potential. Through a series of aptitude and achievement tests, consulting sessions take place one-on-one with a career counselor. Heading this opportunity is the Ball Foundation, a non-for-profit organization aiming to discover and develop human potential through their two programs: Career Vision and Education Initiatives. Career Vision is located in Glen Ellyn and can take on students and professional clients looking to improve and direct their career lives

Resources

- www.careervision.org – Career Vision
- www.ballfoundation.org – The Ball Foundation
- www.aauw.org – The American Association of University Women
- www.womenatworknetwork.org – Women @ Work Network
- www.nawic.org – National Association of Women in Construction
- www.swe.org – The Society of Women Engineers
- www.work4women.org – Work4 Women by Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW)
- www.womma.org – Word of Mouth Marketing Association

