

# Mentoring Matters: The Importance Of Female Mentorship

Committee of 200 Contributor 

*We are female leaders committed to advancing women in business.*

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As senior leaders, we have an obligation to mentor and support women in the workforce—to aid in their professional development, to help build their confidence, and to guide them through challenges as they advance in their careers. I believe mentoring is one of the top strategies to help close the gender gap in business leadership.

Throughout my career in the financial services industry, there were very few women at the top, so I did not have female role models to emulate. As I moved up the corporate ladder, I committed to being a positive female influence and frequently advocated on behalf of other women and helped them succeed. Even today, as a Corporate Director, I often serve as a mentor and a sponsor for women as a

way of giving back and to encourage them to reach their full leadership potential.



Women mentoring women helps them gain access to opportunities and cultivates their confidence in an ... [+] CANVA STOCK MEDIA

## **What is a Mentor?**

A mentor is someone who takes an active interest in your career, serves as a sounding board, shares their experiences and wisdom, encourages new ways of thinking, challenges your assumptions, and helps you learn new skills. Your mentor should be someone with a similar professional mindset who has accomplished the goals you hope to achieve. A mentor can be any age, at any level, and in any field—so don't limit yourself to only those in senior positions at your firm or in the same industry.

## **Finding a Mentor**

Many women would benefit from a mentor, but don't know how to ask. In my opinion, the best way to choose a mentor is to find someone you admire, someone who has a professional style you want to emulate, or a skill set you want to develop—then ask that individual. It can be as simple as approaching this person and

saying, “I admire the way you work and the values you display. Would you be willing to meet with me regularly? I believe there is much I could learn from you.”

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To identify a mentor, start with activities you enjoy, or someone who is a part of your everyday schedule such as a friend. There should be a natural connection; having something in common is the most comfortable place to start a mentorship. Who could you learn from at your favorite volunteer or charitable organization? What about your college alumni network? Do you belong to a gym or other association?

A professional peer can also serve as mentor—a co-worker or someone in the same or similar role at another company. Peer mentors help to motivate and encourage each another, while holding each other accountable for reaching goals. This is why I value being part of C200’s sisterhood—I’ve benefited immensely from the deep connections, professional insight, and female support I’ve received from this peer community of highly successful women entrepreneurs and corporate innovators.



## **Defining Roles and Responsibilities**

Mentees and mentors work best together when establishing mutually agreed-upon goals and objectives. Be truly honest with your mentor about your career goals or aspirations, personal strengths, and areas for improvement.

A mentor relationship can be informal or formal. If you prefer to meet or chat with someone as questions pop up, then an informal relationship may be the best option. For a formal mentorship, I recommend meeting on a regular basis—at least once per month.

## **Use Open and Supportive Communication**

Mentors are there to support you, but you must expect, and accept, honest feedback. Your relationship should foster a safe environment where you both feel comfortable being vulnerable and communicating honestly and candidly. Keep an open mind and remember that your mentor is providing advice and constructive criticism with the best of intentions, even if it's something you don't want to hear.

## **Ways a Mentor Can Help**

Think carefully and intentionally about what you want and need from a mentor. This person can not only aid in your professional development, navigating difficult situations, and handling tricky business relationships but can also help you build confidence in your decisions. For instance, a question I have often received from mentees is, “When do you know it’s time to move on from a position or firm?”

The Great Resignation has seen many professionals leave their current roles in search of greater flexibility, more money, and advancement opportunities. Still, many others aren't happy because they don't feel valued in the workplace. They are rethinking what work means to them.

I created this three-part litmus test to guide mentees in their decision:

1. Does your company’s executive leadership team (and your boss) support you? Are you receiving positive reinforcement and clearly understand what is expected of you?
2. Do you agree with the mission, vision, values, and strategy of the organization?
3. Is work still rewarding for you?

As I listen and help mentees think through these points, my role as a mentor is someone they can trust, confide in, seek advice from, as well as provide a “safe haven” to discuss things they may be uncomfortable discussing with their boss.

## **Collaborate to Solve Problems**

Although you and your mentor will brainstorm ideas and potential outcomes around your specific issues, the final decision about the best solution should be yours. It’s not about a mentor feeding you

the answers, it's about them empowering you to learn and grow in a positive direction.

Recently I served as mentor to a female entrepreneur. Although she had a compelling mission and vision, I was able to assist her in developing a strategic plan. We worked together to designate business priorities, set realistic goals, and develop a budget—areas where I've had much experience and success.

Serving as a mentor and helping others achieve their goals has always been rewarding. While each mentee relationship is unique, the commonality is that I have personally learned something new every time.

## Why Mentoring Matters

Women mentoring women is so important—it helps them gain access to opportunities and cultivates their confidence in an often still male-dominated business environment. When more women lead, it creates a diversified leadership team open to discussing multiple perspectives that improves decision-making and strengthens the organization to face the challenges of the future.

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