

Catapult Your Career or Business – Hire a Maven!

By Alexandra Timbas and Ann Tardy

Young women professionals are always given this advice: “If you want to succeed, you need a mentor.” A *mentor*--an older and more experienced person who guides a younger or less experienced person throughout career challenges--it seems is the key to a successful career. Women stand to benefit greatly from having a mentor to help advance their careers, transitions, and relationships and, in doing so, to gain economic power. But mentors do not just magically appear in a cloud of fairy dust to save the day, and women need to stop waiting around to be “chosen” by a role model who wants to be her mentor. What if instead women hired a professional mentor, a *Maven*, to guide them in any area of their career, business or life? A Maven is not a coach or a therapist; a Maven is an expert hired to share skills, knowledge, and expertise.

Traditionally, a mentor and her “student” share a deep and personal relationship that is dependant on several factors. First, the two parties usually have a mutual respect and compatibility--they must *like* each other. The second factor is that both parties stand to gain something from their personal and professional relationship--the student the skills, knowledge, leverage, or contacts of the mentor; the mentor the leadership skills, recognition, or sense of well-being that being a mentor bring. And thirdly, the benefits exchanged must be applicable in both parties’ lives in order to be relevant.

Arguably, this notion of *Mavens* eliminates the mutual respect/compatibility/likeability factor in traditional mentor/student relationships; however, it allows for the parties to create a relationship that is strictly professional and mutually beneficial. Replacing the more altruistic benefits of a traditional relationship, *Mavens* are now able to gain something concrete--a paycheck--while the student is guaranteed to gain the knowledge, contacts and expertise not otherwise available. Hiring a *Maven* allows women to work with a mentor for a specific project or goal for a set period of time. This alleviates the pressure of a mentor being the be-all end-all to the student, while allowing the student to absorb different skills from different people.

The word *Maven* does not necessarily imply that the hired mentor should be a woman. But do women mentors provide better guidance than men mentors? Or is there really a big difference?

In a recent study, women with mentors said that male mentors provided “general business training, leadership opportunities, coaching, feedback, and advice as well as networking and advancement opportunities.” Women mentors provided most significantly “informal fellowship, guidance with the corporation, motivation, and encouragement,” as well as, “strategies for women’s career success, work/life balance, job share, maternity leave, advice on overcoming gender bias, and even style advice.” Male mentors have many important skills to offer, but women mentors share the actual experience that the young women professionals are going through. In order to increase women’s economic power in society and individually, women need strong women role models.

The idea of mentoring is not new, but the traditional mentor models need to be tweaked to give more women the opportunity to benefit both as a mentor and a mentee. Additionally, when women are paid for their time and expertise, their personal value and self-esteem increase because they are acknowledged for having something valuable to

share. Both parties stand to gain from mentor/student relationships (be they professional or informal), but encouraging women to hire *Mavens* gives them the key to the castle – the opportunity to succeed. And encouraging women to be hired as *Mavens* gives them the opportunity to experience economic value for their skills, knowledge, and expertise. Consequently, *Mavens* increase women’s success and women’s economic power.

Resources we consulted:

“Poll Finds 62% of Women Have Mentors”. WomenOf.com.
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Schlegel, Margaret. “Women mentoring women”. Monitor on Psychology. 10
November 200. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/nov00.mentoring.html>.