

Catapult the Women in Your Company – Teach Them to Find Their Own Mentors!

By Ann Tardy

Give a woman a mentor, guide her for a day; Teach her how to find one and guide her for a lifetime. Young women professionals are always given the 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 various career challenges. This is apparently 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 we taught women how to find their own mentors to guide them in any area of their career, business or life? Imagine how this would transform the “mentor” program at your company.

A Mentor is not a coach or a therapist; its someone who has an expertise, skills, knowledge or experiences from which another can benefit. Traditionally, a mentor and her “student” share a deep and personal relationship that is dependent 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 discovers skills, knowledge, leverage, exposure, or contacts from the mentor; the mentor gets leadership skills, recognition, and personal fulfillment from contributing to another. And thirdly, the benefits exchanged must be applicable in both parties’ lives in order to be relevant.

Arguably, this notion of teaching women to actively recruit find their own Mentor eliminates the mentor/mentee relationships that get created naturally over time; however, it allows for the parties to create a professional and mutually beneficial relationship. Recruiting a Mentor allows women to create a relationship for a specific project or goal for a set period of time, encouraging her to have more than one mentor. This approach alleviates the pressure on the Mentor as be-all end-all to the mentee, while allowing the mentee to absorb different skills from different people.

Some tips to pass on to women as they start recruiting their own Mentors:

- Document a specific goal to achieve
- Identify a man or woman in the company that has the skills, experience, or knowledge that would contribute to the achievement of that goal
- Create and present a Mentor Proposal including value to Mentor
- Negotiate structure with Mentor including time frame and end date

The idea of mentoring is not new, but traditional “mentor programs” fall short in significantly impacting women’s experiences in corporations because we fail to teach women first how to recruit their own mentors and be mentors for other women. Women stand to benefit from being a Mentor and being a Mentee, and encouraging them to recruit their own Mentors gives them the key to the castle – the opportunity to succeed.