

WOMEN'S MENTORING WISDOM: RESEARCH AT A GLANCE



Background

Much has been said and written about the importance of mentors for career advancement. However, there is a huge gap in the research regarding how women act in mentoring relationships and how their actions affect their career aspirations and ultimate success. The study aimed to shed light on this under-researched area.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative research methodology focusing on in-depth interviews with 26 alumnae of the WOMEN Unlimited LEAD Program. All were in the mid-career stage and from Fortune 500 companies. They reflected a broad spectrum of positions and industries, with no two women from the same company.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to understand from the women's perspective as mentees, how they viewed their mentoring relationships. In addition, this research sought to understand how mentoring relationships contributed to the women's leadership development and career advancement.

Research Implications

Providing an environment in which mid-level women can actively seek out and develop mentor relationships is an important strategy for organizations wishing to increase the number of women in senior leadership roles. It is equally important for mentees to prepare for these relationships, act on the insights provided by their mentors, and apply what they learn about relationship-building to their organizational behavior. Research indicates that organizations, mentors and mentees must all acknowledge that finding a mentor is only the first step to achieving long-term success.

Findings

The operative word in the findings is *"intentional."* It proved to be the key to success for mentees. For our research, "intentional" meant deliberate actions by the mentee to positively affect a desired outcome. The women mentees were most successful when they were "intentional" in three specific areas:

- 1. Intentional preparation for their mentoring relationship:** The most effective preparations were multi-faceted and involved the protégé's clarifying her own goals so that the mentoring could be focused on her aims and ambitions developing, in advance, a strategy for engagement to ensure the relationship was open and productive.
- 2. Intentional leveraging of their mentor's insights:** Applying their mentor's insights and perspectives to their organizational behavior allowed mentees to "show up" in new ways that advanced their growth and development. Among the many benefits, they were able to: enhance their visibility...better navigate the corporate landscape...pinpoint the right time to take the right risks...and develop an effective style that was true to themselves. After applying the "mentor lessons learned", the mentees would debrief their mentors and gain even further insights for honing their organizational behavior.
- 3. Intentional relationship building:** Mentees who transferred what they learned from their mentor relationships to over-all organizational relationships enjoyed increased success in their careers. They better understood how to develop relationships with key people. They were less reluctant to approach those who could be of help to their advancement. They tended to reach out more within the organization, allowing them to get a "better line of sight" on the bigger picture.