

Networking and Mentoring

Not just "girl talk"

Mentoring has always been a part of the workplace atmosphere for men. As more women enter the workforce, they too are becoming a vital part of the networking and mentoring process. Today, women are seeing more of the positive impacts created by mentoring and networking as they advance in their careers.

Differences between networking and mentoring

Networking is important when you are trying to find a job/career. Everyone has heard: "It's not what you know, but who you know." Networking allows women the opportunity to meet other people (especially women) who have similar professional interests.

Mentors are people with experience who can give advice and help you move up in your field. Mentors are important for women entering the workforce as they can help guide decisions made early on and throughout a woman's career. While a mentor can be helpful when looking for a job, it also important to find a mentor once you have a job. A mentor can help you to begin looking at career options.



Similarities between networking and mentoring

Relationships are a part of everyone's life, whether between friends, family members or significant others.

While networking is an activity that you take part in to get to know people and make contacts, mentoring is a relationship. You develop the relationship with an individual who takes personal interest in your growth and development as a professional. Think of networking as a web exposing you to people across a broad spectrum, while mentoring is a single line between you and your mentor.

Networking allows you to meet people in the professional world, which then allows you the ability to build a relationship with a person who can become your mentor in the workplace.

Networking

What is it and why is it important?

Often referred to as "schmoozing," networking involves establishing relationships to exchange information, support and services. Networking includes both formal and informal meetings. Both are extremely beneficial for career advancement.

Formal Networking: How to do it

- **Research and decide the type of work that interests you.** If the field interests you, it is very likely that it interests someone else as well. A networking opportunity is close at hand. Begin searching for organizations that already have groups set up. General searches on the Internet at your local library can help you find these groups. Getting involved will help you connect with others who already have contacts established with employers in your location or field. Check the resources section on page 3 for ways to find a professional organization.
- **Begin making contact whether by phone, fax, email or in person.** The most important thing you can do is make yourself known to employers. Also, be informed about what the company does and the important people associated with it. While networking alone cannot secure you a job, it will help you along.
- **Always be prepared to write down information, or give your information to a prospective employer.** Business cards are great for giving your information to a possible employer. Once you get an employer's information, hold it. If they do not have a business card at the time you meet, make sure you keep cell phone, pen and address book or palm pilot handy.

Informal Networking: How to do it

- **Make friends with people who are already involved in work that interests you.** Often when a person gets a job it is because they already know someone connected with the business or trade. If you keep in contact with the friends you have made, they may let you know when jobs become available before they get posted for the public.
- **Let others know what you are doing.** As you make others aware of what you want to do, including family, friends, and professionals in your field of interest, they may send suggestions and opportunities your way. Think of them as satellites in your network.

Mentoring

What is it and why is it important?

Mentoring is a lot like coaching. When you join a workforce you are essentially joining a team. When you are new to this team, you want to find a mentor to assist you in making career decisions. With a little advice and direction, adjusting to your new job won't be nearly as difficult as it would be if you were doing it alone. Some work places have mentoring programs already set up, but many do not. If your work place has a program, use it. If not, there are plenty of other ways you can find a mentor.

Mentoring Works!

- More than half of women entrepreneurs have had mentors, and of those nearly half (48 percent) had mentors who were also women.
- Mentoring of women is on the rise: 68 percent of women aged 18-29 say they have had mentors compared with only 56 percent of women aged 50 or more.

* Facts taken from Avon Survey, June 4, 1998.

Finding a Mentor

- **Find someone in your office who is successful, and someone whom you can trust.** Generally, successful people are successful because they made mistakes and corrected them, or had a mentor to steer them in the right direction. Because you are a woman entering the workforce, you may want to find a woman mentor.
- **Look to a role model within your department.** Think of yourself as an apprentice to your mentor; try to learn her trade.

- **Once you have found a potential mentor, use the direct approach.** Don't be intimidated by the person you have chosen to be your mentor. When you speak with her, be polite. Tell her you understand that she is busy, but you want to advance in the workplace. Ask her if she can help you. While successful women who are prospective mentors are very busy, they will most likely be flattered you asked, and willing to work with you. If not, try and find another mentor.

Interacting with your Mentor

- **Establish a regular meeting time.** Don't expect to meet with your mentor every day or even every week (especially in larger work places). If she is busy, ask if you can contact her by phone or email to check in. The rest is up to you and your mentor.
- **Don't be afraid of constructive criticism.** Your mentor is there to help you. She may sometimes tell you things you don't want to hear. Be ready for positive and negative feedback as your mentor helps you take a closer look at your work habits.
- **Remember: while you should be comfortable with a mentor, it's a working relationship.** It is your mentor's job to be aware of what is going on in your career. Your mentor's role in your life is professional, not personal. Off the clock contact may not be appropriate.
- **Maintain a good relationship with your mentor.** While you should be ready to take some criticism, it is up to you to draw the line if such feedback becomes unhelpful. If you feel uncomfortable, you should feel free to find a new mentor.

Book Resources:

Nonstop Networking

by Andrea R. Nierenberg (September 2002)

A Foot in the Door: Networking Your Way into the Hidden Job Market

by Katherine Hansen (May 200)

The 12 Secrets of Highly Creative Women: A Portable Mentor

by Gail McMeekin (February 2000)

Online Resources:

Quintessential Careers: Women's Networking and Professional Associations

This is a great comprehensive resource with lots of links to both online resources and booklists.

http://www.quintcareers.com/womensnetworking_organizations.html

Advancing Women

This website is a resource for women in the workforce, specializing in women networking with women.

<http://www.advancingwomen.com/Networksindex.html>

Bella Online: Career

This website is a comprehensive multimedia network created by women for women. Subjects include career planning, networking, skills inventory, etc.

<http://www.bellaonline.com/Channel/c2.asp>

The Riley Guide: Resources for Women, Minorities, and Other Affinity Groups and Audiences

<http://www.rileyguide.com/diverse.html>

Networking: Making Connections that Lead to Success

Business and Professional Women/USA

<http://www.bpwusa.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3737>

Networking Never Stops: Tips for Making (and Keeping) Strong Connections

<http://www.roadandtravel.com/businessandcareer/careers/networking.htm>

MentorNet

This website allows students to get an online mentor: <http://www.mentornet.net/>