

# What Managers Need to Know

## Facilitating Women's Career Success through Mentorship and Sponsorship

This section distills insights from men in leadership and HBA's Honorable Mentors about how male managers can make a positive difference in women's careers.

### **MENTORING IS A LEADERSHIP ROLE.**

Male allies in senior management roles were emphatic that mentoring is a foundational leadership responsibility, described as 'part of the job' and 'a way to pay it forward.'

Intentionality in how managers approach mentoring makes a difference. Given the human tendency to be drawn to those like ourselves, perhaps sharing similar interests or affiliations, male leaders more easily develop relationships with men than with women. These relationships, unconsciously and consciously, evolve into mentoring, and benefit men throughout their careers in ways that women lack. Men can mitigate this tendency by reaching out to women (and men) in a structured way so as to develop professional relationships and diversify their networks.

### **MENTORING MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT THE SAME.**

Facilitating women's career success requires a different approach than mentoring men. Women highly value managers who see them, and their careers, in the broader context of their lives. Learning about women's families, outside interests and aspirations enable men to be better mentors.

Women are highly ambitious yet express their ambition in ways that may be less recognizable to men. Women think about their career progression as one important part of a bigger whole. The repercussions of her career choices—for her family, community and even her work colleagues—often play an important, even decisive, role in her decision-making.

Women's perceptions of what constitutes being qualified for a job differs greatly from men. Based on research, while men are likely to apply for a position for which they possess 60 percent of the desired skills, women are loath to apply without 90 percent or more of the skillset under their belt. Allies indicate women routinely underestimate their competencies and struggle with professional confidence to a greater extent than men.

Given these gender-differentials, women commonly need coaching on issues such as encouraging her to seek a promotion, helping her consider the trade-offs of career decisions, understanding and owning her strengths, and building her confidence. Male allies also serve women by providing them with direct feedback, even when it's challenging, rather than 'going easy on them for fear of being mean or of their crying.' Men support women's careers by helping them process difficult feedback and put it in perspective.

### **RECOGNIZE BIASES.**

It's far too easy to underestimate the extent to which unconscious biases drive the majority of day-to-day decisions. Humility is required to accept the universality of unconscious biases and understand the importance of building skills to combat them.

Given men typically have a preponderance of men in their professional networks, there are risks of affiliation driving access to professional opportunities and men conflating the sense of connection and comfort with superior performance. It's important to remain vigilant in ensuring talent decisions are based on substantive criteria such as skills, experience and leadership style. Managers—both male and female—need clear processes for guiding business decision-making.

### **INSIGHTS FROM HBA HONORABLE MENTORS**

**After you recognize** women raise their hand less often, what do you do differently? You talk to them directly. It is a manager's responsibility to create the best slate for an open role and only interviewing people who raise their hand does not accomplish this.

**MICHAEL KAUFMANN**  
CEO, Cardinal Health

**Women can do anything a man can do, but they have to accumulate the knowledge and experiences required to develop their skill set. Men get these experiences, which helps them progress in their careers. When women get the same opportunities for development, they will do better. For this to happen, men must play a more powerful role.**

**WILLIAM SHELDON**  
CEO, Eisai

**Men want business mentoring and women want career mentoring.**

# What Managers Need to Know: Facilitating Women's Career Success through Mentorship and Sponsorship *cont.*

## UNDERSTAND THE ME-TOO MOVEMENT.

The Me-Too movement has been both a catalyst for a critically-important conversation about harassment in the workplace and for the reversal of progress for gender equity in the workplace.

Me-Too has shined a light on the pervasiveness of harassment that women confront and validated women's direct experiences, empowering them to report problematic behaviors and insisting men are respectful and professional in their interactions.

At the same time, the Me-Too movement has had a chilling effect on men's willingness to mentor women which threatens to set back the hard-won professional gains women have made over recent decades. Male ally leaders emphasize the need to discuss the impacts of the Me-Too movement and advise male managers to be intentional about equity, "If you're not willing to have time alone with women then you can't have it with men. If you have a function, make sure if it's attractive to men that it's also attractive to women. You cannot favor men."

## USE GOOD JUDGMENT AND COMMON SENSE.

Given the importance of men mentoring and working closely with both women and men, it's essential that men employ good judgment in deepening their relationships with the women that they mentor and manage. Surprisingly, some men feel unclear about the rules of engagement in interactions with female colleagues and fear being falsely accused of harassment. Men need have no fear if they ensure that work relationships are professional and appropriate. Instead of meeting in a bar at night, they can meet for a breakfast meeting in the company cafeteria.

Men need to remain mindful of power differentials and to avoid sexualizing the work environment. A simple test that men can employ, if questioning the *appropriateness of* behaviors, is to ask themselves, how they would feel if a man treated their wife, daughter or female friend in that way? Their answer tells them what they need to know.

## SPONSORING WOMEN IS CRITICAL.

For multiple reasons, men sponsoring women for career opportunities is vitally important. According to research, women tend to be promoted based on past performance while men are promoted based on potential.

Women get caught in a Catch-22 whereby they are viewed as unqualified because they lack experience yet they are unable to obtain the requisite experience because they are not given the chance—and the support—to prove themselves. Sponsors are the lynchpin, breaking the deadlock. They help women to stop limiting themselves, push women to take risks, provide women with a professional learning curve and share the unwritten rules.

The role of a sponsor is critical because the perception persists that women are 'riskier choices' for senior level roles. Because there are far fewer women in the top leadership ranks, the visibility of every woman is very high and her performance—positive or negative—is heightened. Sponsors play the critical role of backing women when major challenges arise.

## THE MENTORING CONUNDRUM

A complex aspect of mentoring women is the tendency to do so in the image of the male leaders who have been professionally successful. The challenge is without the expansion of leadership behaviors to encompass those that are more resonant with women, women will continue to experience the high cost of adaption that moves them to leave their organizations or downshift their aspirations. Additionally, the women who do ascend to the most senior roles will behave more similarly to men, thus reducing or negating the value of gender diversity.

The mentoring conundrum is men (and women) mentoring women in the masculine model which serves to perpetuate the status quo.

Consider that women are often counseled to be direct, talk less and get to the point more quickly. Yet women's more loquacious style is often linked to their strength in relationship building and their tendency to consider challenges holistically, incorporating the needs of multiple stakeholder groups.

The goal is to expand the palette of characteristics that signify leadership and to lessen the requirement of diverse employees to shape-shift so as to fit in.

## HBA HONORABLE MENTORS SHARE INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS

Reach out broadly across levels for input	Set the tone through words and behaviors	Seek the unvarnished truth and listen well	Don't overreact or embarrass people (if you want truth)	Don't believe your own press	Seek to recognize and combat your own biases	Don't shy away from vulnerability (it builds connection)
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