Mentors

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/margiewarrell/2017/06/24/women-mentoring/#66d5332522db>

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**Mentoring Matters: How More Women Can Get The Right People In Their Corner**

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* [In male dominated professions, where women often face even greater challenges building networks and embracing feminine leadership strengths, mentoring has proven even more paramount.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Fmargiewarrell%2F2017%2F06%2F24%2Fwomen-mentoring%2F&text=In%20male%20dominated%20professions%20%23mentoring%20is%20even%20more%20paramount%20for%20women%20%40WomenatForbes%20%23GenderGap%20%40margiewarrell)

It's well established that the economic empowerment of women isn't just good for women, it's good for everyone. Likewise, there is a growing body of evidence (including the [latest report by McKinsey & Co](http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/women-matter)) showing that  [when more women sit at the decision-making tables, better decisions are made.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Fmargiewarrell%2F2017%2F06%2F24%2Fwomen-mentoring%2F&text=When%20more%20women%20sit%20at%20the%20decision-making%20tables%2C%20better%20decisions%20are%20made.%20%23gendergap%20%23womenleaders%20%40margiewarrell)

Yet despite record numbers of women graduating college and entering the workforce, data still points to a 'leaky pipeline' - a large chasm between the number of women starting out on the professional track and how many advancing to senior positions.  One of the many ways we can help to 'leak-proof' this pipeline is through mentoring. That is, getting more people already in positions of influence actively supporting, sponsoring and guiding the careers of women as they progress through their careers, particularly at pivotal decision points.

While some debate the merit of mentorship within its traditional parameters, when it’s expanded to include sponsorship and advocacy, it’s proven to be a critical element of success by providing protégés with the opportunity to broaden their perspective, build social capital, navigate organizational politics more strategically, and muster up the confidence to ‘lean in’ and speak up when it matters most. [In male dominated professions, where women often face even greater challenges building networks and embracing feminine leadership strengths, mentoring has proven even more paramount.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Fmargiewarrell%2F2017%2F06%2F24%2Fwomen-mentoring%2F&text=In%20male%20dominated%20professions%20%23mentoring%20is%20even%20more%20paramount%20for%20women%20%40WomenatForbes%20%23GenderGap%20%40margiewarrell)

A 2017 study by professional services firm [Egon Zehnder](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/public-gbda/Leaders_Daughters_Final.pdf) found that [only 54% of women have access to senior leaders who act as mentors or informal sponsors in their career.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Fmargiewarrell%2F2017%2F06%2F24%2Fwomen-mentoring%2F&text=Only%2054%25%20of%20career%20women%20have%20access%20to%20snr%20leaders%20who%20act%20as%20mentors%20or%20informal%20sponsors.%20%40margiewarrell%20%23GenderGap) While advocacy and sponsorship rates decline as age increases, the women with the highest level of support are those already sitting in the C-suite.

This research suggests that if women don’t reach a critical threshold in their career early enough, they either stop reaching out for support or their organizations stop extending it. All of which presents a double opportunity both for women and the organizations in which they work.  For women, to be more deliberate in seeking mentors and establishing relationships with influencers. For organizations, to be more proactive in developing mentoring programs that foster a culture where mentoring is institutionalized, as the value of mentoring often goes well beyond the boosting of individual careers. It provides a means for elevating knowledge transfer across divisions, retaining institutional and practical know-how while keeping mentors in touch with the ‘front-lines’ of the business that they might otherwise be distanced from.

Below are six ways women can help land the right people in their corner and, in doing so, help to elevate and empower other women as they rise.

**1.       Clarify your ideal mentor**

Get clear about what you want in a mentor or sponsor. Is it an expert who can help with a specific challenge such as how to polish your presentation style or build your brand in your new workplace, or are you looking for someone with an inside track to be a more general sounding board and advocate for you over the long haul?

**2.       Be brave and ask**

A study by [Development Dimensions International (DDI)](http://www.ddiworld.com/ddi/media/trend-research/womenasmentors_rr_ddi.pdf?ext=.pdf) found that while nearly 80% of women in senior roles had served as formal mentors, only 63 % of women had ever had one. This is despite the fact that a majority of women view mentoring as valuable. So what’s missing? It would seem a sheer willingness to ask… or perhaps more accurately, the courage to risk a rejection or impose on someone’s time.  Research shows that men tend to seek and offer mentorship far more readily, while women typically need to be found and encouraged (Laff, 2009).

So if you’re a woman, just know that the odds of someone agreeing to mentor you are in your favor if you go about it the right way. 71% of women in the DDI study reported they always accept invitations to be formal mentors at work, and the vast majority said they would mentor more if they were asked. The bottom line: [if you would value the advice of someone you admire, have the courage to ask for it.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Fmargiewarrell%2F2017%2F06%2F24%2Fwomen-mentoring%2F&text=If%20you%20would%20value%20the%20advice%20of%20someone%20you%20admire%2C%20have%20the%20courage%20to%20ask%20for%20it.%20%23mentoring%20%23women%20%40margiewarrell) You don’t need to be overly formal about it, just ask if they could give you some time to provide guidance. Let the relationship evolve from there.

**3.       Set expectations early**

Anyone whose advice you’d value is likely someone who has a lot of demands on their time. So value it highly! You might ask them if they would be willing to give you 30 minutes every few months, or if you could take them out for a coffee once a month or so.  Let them know what you’d love to gain from talking to them and ask them to suggest what might work best.  Given that learning is the key underlying purpose of mentorship, clearly articulating what you’d like to learn from them will help make it a better investment of time both ways.

**4.       Look beyond the obvious**

Women tend to mentor other women more frequently than men (73% women mentor women according to DDI) but the paucity of women up the ladder ahead of you may mean that you need to [look beyond your ladder to find a mentor.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Fmargiewarrell%2F2017%2F06%2F24%2Fwomen-mentoring%2F&text=Look%20beyond%20your%20ladder%20to%20find%20a%20mentor.%20Having%20a%20diversity%20of%20people%20in%20your%20corner%20is%20pivotal%20%40margiewarrell)  As Debbie Kissire, executive director at Ernst & Young shared with me at women's leadership event (video below), there’s a strong case for building relationships with male mentors, particularly if you’re in a male dominated industry.  The vast majority of men value the opportunity to support women so be careful not to assume otherwise.

Mentoring also doesn’t have to be strictly business. You can find mentors outside the workplace within your local community or from associations you’re involved with.  You could try finding someone from your university alumni. Likewise, don’t be limited by age. Digital immigrants can gain a wealth of knowledge from millennials who’ve grown up in the digital era. My kids have taught me more about how to use hashtags and build my brand on Instagram than anyone my age ever could!

**5.       Make it a two-way value exchange**

The value exchange in a mentor relationship can be heavily weighted in toward the mentee, but that doesn’t mean you can’t reciprocate by supporting their work and building their leadership brand. For instance, tweet out their posts, nominate them for an award, share their updates on LinkedIn or start a discussion that positions them as the expert or refer business their way. Of course you can also show your gratitude by giving them a book you think they’d enjoy or by sharing information or resources they may find helpful.

**6.       Mentor other women (even if you doubt what you offer)**

Contrary to the assumed culture of rivalry and “catfighting” between women, studies show that it’s not competition that keeps more women from supporting other women through mentoring, it’s that they don’t feel they know enough to act as a mentor. Yet the fact that women tend to doubt themselves more and back themselves less than men (creating a globally recognized ‘gender confidence gap’) is the very reason more women need to lift as they climb - encouraging other women to raise their sights and act with the confidence they wish they had.

Even if you don’t think you’ve ‘made it’ (yet) or think you lack the expertise that might benefit a potential mentee, you’re still a long way ahead of women who are just starting out or are making a career transition. [Don’t undervalue the insights, work/family juggling skills and hard-won wisdom you’ve acquired to get to where you are today.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Fmargiewarrell%2F2017%2F06%2F24%2Fwomen-mentoring%2F&text=Women%3A%20Don%E2%80%99t%20undervalue%20ur%20insights%20%26%20the%20value%20you%20can%20give%20to%20other%20women%20through%20%23mentoring.%20%20%40margiewarrell) A recent analysis by Harvard Business Review found that once people reach the C-suite, the soft skills of leadership matter far more than technical skill  ([Groysberg, 2011](https://hbr.org/2011/03/the-new-path-to-the-c-suite%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)). Accordingly, while you may no longer be the ‘go-to’ technical whiz, your ability to gain collaboration, influence upward and navigate the mire of workplace politics can be gold to someone who needs it.

Passing along a useful resource, referring a potential client, putting someone’s name forward for a role that will elevate their visibility or even connecting them to someone else who could be a great mentor – w [omen who go out of their way to support other women set off a ripple effect that leaves everyone better off.](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.forbes.com%2Fsites%2Fmargiewarrell%2F2017%2F06%2F24%2Fwomen-mentoring%2F&text=Women%20who%20support%20other%20women%20set%20off%20a%20ripple%20effect%20that%20leaves%20everyone%20better%20off%20%40margiewarrell%20%23gendergap%20%23women) After all, a rising tide lifts all boats.

*Margie Warrell is a bestselling author,* [*speaker*](http://www.margiewarrell.com/speaking) *and Ambassador for Women in Global Business. Check out her latest book*[Make Your Mark.](http://www.margiewarrell.com/make-your-mark)