

Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Women

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

A mentor is defined as someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced person in that role.

Mentoring is not the same as training, teaching, or coaching, and a mentor does not need to be a qualified trainer or a subject matter expert in all areas of the career. A mentor should have the ability to listen and ask questions that will challenge the mentee to identify the course of action that needs to be taken regarding the mentee's own development.

"Mentors shine as you start to define your dream. They can see and put into words for you what you may not see about yourself or be able to articulate. They can help you determine your strengths: what you do exceptionally well and what sets you apart." Sylvia Ann Hewlett, founding president and CEO of Center for Talent Innovation (CTI).

A sponsor serves a different, but complementary, purpose. A sponsor advocates for their proteges, helping to open doors and providing visibility so that others can recognize their capabilities and potential for advancement. Sponsors play an important role especially in a woman's career progression, and promotion is the key objective.

MENTORING BENEFITS WOMEN

Mentoring programs in the workplace have been proven to reduce high turnover rates, tackle diversity problems, and improve employee engagement. There are many additional benefits to these programs including a more productive workforce, a positive workplace atmosphere, and a more skilled employee base.

Based on research from the CTI, 85% of women benefit from "navigational support" to help guide them in career decisions and achieve success in their field. Mentors and sponsors can provide such support.

Effective use and integration of mentoring and sponsorship can be a highly beneficial means to encourage more women to enter and remain in the field of aviation.

Mentoring can be useful across all industries, including aviation and aerospace. In industries where women are underrepresented, mentoring becomes even more important.

Mentoring, once in the workplace, ensures that all career women have exposure to progression, can expand their networks, and have the resources and opportunities to learn and grow. Regardless of the stage of progression on this journey, a critical component in the mentoring process is to instill confidence.

Mentors can explore the strengths of their mentees, shine a light on their attributes and enable them to build on these capabilities. Confidence can reduce self-doubt and provides a positive focus for a can-do approach for building additional skill sets and taking on the next challenge.

HOW MENTORING WORKS

All mentoring programs have similar key values- inspiring, connecting, and motivating. Mentoring taps into the knowledge, skills, and experience of a more advanced person to help transfer these attributes to their mentee.

As we consider what success looks like for mentor and sponsor relationships, it is important to consider each of these distinct roles and how and when they can be best used during one's career planning and progression.

CHALLENGES

Career Advice

It is important to promote career opportunities within the industry. Networking with career advisers and schools to advertise career paths is crucial. Formal programs at the professional level are a catalyst for placement, movement, and promotion. Programs for elementary and high school children encourage and inspire.

There is clear evidence that Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) mentoring programs have become increasingly popular for children aged 3-18. Having the ability to inspire children in their formative years can plant the seeds for sustaining interest and enable their decisions for educational curriculums geared toward future careers in aviation.

Mentoring girls in middle school, high school, and universities, especially by women aviation professionals, is the next critical step on the journey. These professionals serve as role models, and further their thinking to pursue similar careers.

Family Support

Families also play a key role – starting from childhood and throughout the career. Family support for girls and women is especially important for participation; financially, practically, and emotionally, as they are minorities in the field. Family encouragement and support makes a significant difference for women.

Maintaining Engagement

Mentoring is beneficial at all levels. To be sustainable and accessible over a period, mentees need to be able to grow and gain experience and they may need new mentors as they advance.

Administration and Oversight

Administration and oversight require time and resources as mentors need to be identified and trained. A formal mentoring programme should incorporate a budget and training for mentors.

Community of Support

When women are surveyed about mentors, they seem to respond better to the concepts of community of support versus an individual mentor. Mentoring may be more successful if it promotes these programs as communities of support and then mentor relationships would emerge from those communities. Women mentors inspire as they bring in the experience of success and failure. When younger women are in a forum, they naturally establish relationships with more experienced women and then exchange details to continue their new relationship.

SUMMARY

Both mentors and sponsors help to impart knowledge, explore options, to be supportive of the many avenues available, and to help match dreams to opportunities. Mentoring and sponsoring opens doors that some women don't know exist, or don't know how to access. Once the doors are opened, mentors and sponsors can serve as advocates to mentees to help chart successful careers. This will advance the opportunity to improve women's representation in the aviation industry.