

# Cross-Gender Relations in a Post #MeToo World

Does #MeToo Mean the End of Mentoring for Women?



# #InANutshell

Men and women emerge from what was a #MeToo explosion and find ourselves misaligned. We're eye-to-eye in our desire for change, our want for equality and common-sense decency, but divided in how we attain this or can we even attain this? We're also unsure how we now interact and approach the delicate interpersonal relationships of the workplace.

Mentoring is all about relationships, about confidential exchange, about breaking it down and building trust.

So how do we, as men and women, continue along this path in a safe and supportive way – without retreat from either party?

Art of Mentoring conducted a survey in line with that of LeanIn.Org founder, Sheryl Sandberg, to understand the impact of #MeToo on workplace attitudes outside the U.S. We found the same theme as the U.S. study, that men (more so than women) feel less comfortable than they did a year ago with cross-gender workplace interaction.

Australian men overall, however, have been less affected by the allegations and are more determined to maintain equality in the workplace.

But this does not mean there is no room for improvement – as there most certainly is!

Our report identifies key concerns for women in the workforce as:

- > underestimating their own abilities
- > feeling like an imposter and that they don't belong
- > struggling to take credit for their achievements and accomplishments
- > holding back from assertiveness for fear of being judged.

With gender inequality rife in leadership and remuneration — particularly in certain industries and professions — we need men to take charge and bring this into balance. To cast aside the aspersions of gender and fear of reprimand, and foster a workplace culture for the benefit of all. Women need men to mentor and sponsor them.

While actress

Alyssa Milano created the impetus for the current #MeToo movement on Twitter, it was American social activist and community organiser Tarana Burke who first coined the phrase on MySpace to promote "empowerment through empathy" among women of colour who have experienced sexual abuse, particularly within underprivileged communities. Burke has said she was inspired to use the phrase after being unable to respond to a 13-year-old girl who confided to her that she had been sexually assaulted.

Burke later wished she had simply told the girl, "me too".

However, our study found that many men do not have the capability or don't feel comfortable with providing the mentorship and sponsorship that women need.

Tactically, men can:

- > stop waiting for female mentees to be assigned to them and step forward to offer support
- > volunteer for formal mentoring programs to show their support in galvanising workplace equality
- > take time to learn the nuances of how best to mentor women
- > seek to be mentored by women (where possible), to learn from a woman how best to interact with women in the workplace.

Organisations can support men by providing mentoring programs that have defined codes of conduct, specific training for mentors and targeted selection and matching criteria that honours both parties in a mentoring relationship.

Don't get us wrong; it's not all a one-way street and women have their part to play. We feel it's essential that cross-gender relationships be cultivated, for what they can bring to a company's cultural development and diversity. Our tips for success are outlined towards the end of this report.

It's time we work as one and build the strong foundations we so lack.

We might just need a kick-start by the menfolk!



Melissa Richardson  
Managing Director & Co-Founder  
Art of Mentoring

## Just 6 months ago the #MeToo movement

began as a Twitter awareness campaign by a North American female actor, to make public her allegations of sexual assault and harassment at the hands of at least one prominent Hollywood producer, giving other victims a channel to voice their experiences.

It garnered an enormous international following and an outpouring of testimony and led to award-winning investigations by journalists at the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*.

**#MeToo** and its action response **#TimesUp** have grown into a broad international campaign of awareness, empathy and action supporting women, men, people of colour and the LGBTI community who have been subjected to harassment, discrimination and violence.

# #MentorHer - A Call to Action

In response to concerns about the #MeToo backlash, founder of LeanIn.Org, Sheryl Sandberg commissioned a study into the extent of men's withdrawal from working with women.

LeanIn.Org and Survey Monkey polled 3,000 U.S. workers in early 2018, and found that **almost 50% more senior male managers, and 40% more men overall, now feel uncomfortable** participating in common workplace activities with women, than prior to the public reports. Scarily, almost half of senior men now are afraid of interacting in such activities as working alone with, socialising and mentoring women.

**One-quarter of men** surveyed said they are **not comfortable working alone** with a woman — twice as many as prior to the public reports. The number of senior men who are uncomfortable mentoring women has **more than tripled**, from 5% to 16%. The research, which was commissioned after anecdotal evidence suggested such a reaction, means that one in six male managers in the U.S. now hesitates to mentor a woman.

In the face of these alarming findings, Sandberg gained the backing of prominent U.S. industry leaders and CEOs to commit to mentoring women and challenging other men to do the same. Her **#MentorHer** campaign is intended to help women at all levels in organisations, by giving them access to career advice and support, reducing isolationism and ultimately bringing the number of women in leadership positions closer to parity. This, in turn, creates workplaces that experience less sexual harassment and discrimination.

## Australia needs to #MentorHer too

While the #MeToo movement was founded in the U.S. entertainment industry, Australian women experience sexual violence, harassment and gender discrimination at alarming rates.

When journalist Tracey Spicer launched an investigation into the Australian media industry, she received 1,500 complaints, and investigations have commenced into the behaviour of more than 20 high-profile figures. Her NOW Australia organisation aims to end sexual harassment across Australia's workforces.

The performance of Australian workplaces in terms of workplace equity is in dire need of improvement. According to the World Economic Forum<sup>1</sup>,

“While Australia ranks first out of 144 nations in **educational attainment** for women,  
our ranking plummets to 42 for **economic participation and opportunity**;  
48 for **political empowerment**;  
and a gobsmacking 104 for **health and survival**.  
Australia's overall score is 35, down from 15 in 2006.”

To rectify the under-representation of women in Australian leadership roles and close the pay gap, Australian women need men to step up and pledge to work more closely than ever with their female peers.

**Mentoring women – and being mentored by them – is an important part of the solution.**



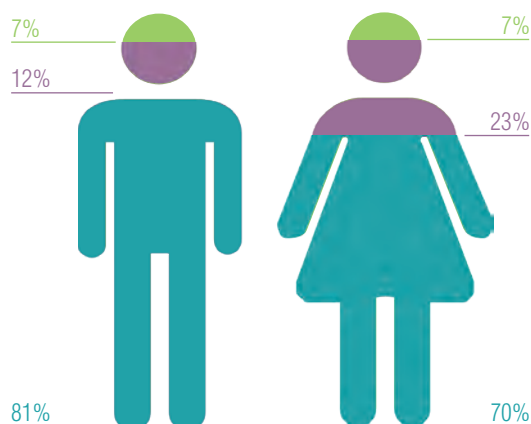
## Let's find out the impacts closer to home

Art of Mentoring was keen to understand how the #MeToo movement has affected working relationships between men and women outside of the U.S. We replicated the questions used in the LeanIn.Org study, added some that are specific to cross-gender mentoring and also included women in our sample to gain a full spectrum review.

We received input from nearly 450 women and 150 men (predominantly from Australia), in varying work situations and at different levels of responsibility as people managers. We haven't weighted the data, so our sample isn't representative of any particular country, but we think they had some interesting things to say.

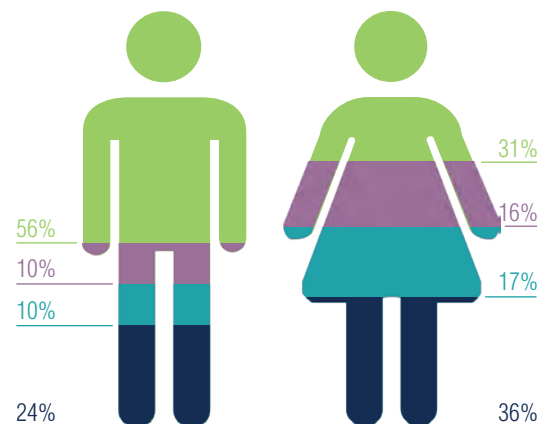
### Respondent Demographics

#### Employment Status



- Working for no pay
- Working part-time
- Working full-time

#### People Management Responsibility



- Senior manager, executive or owner
- First line manager
- Individual contributor paid a salary
- Individual contributor paid by the hour



# What's with the attitude?

## The #MeToo Movement has affected men's attitudes

We asked men and women whether the recent highly publicised reports of sexual harassment made them feel uncomfortable working alone with a member of the opposite gender.

**One-quarter of the men** who responded said that they felt “a little” (18%) or “very” (7%) **uncomfortable**. This is just a little lower than the findings in the U.S., where 31% of men felt less comfortable working alone with women following the reports.

“I'm a middle-aged male. Regardless of the truth (or lack thereof) of any accusation, mud sticks.”

## However women have been largely unaffected

The **majority of women** (and many of the men) who responded to our survey **don't feel uncomfortable** working alone with a member of the opposite gender, when it's done with mutual respect and transparency.

Just 7% of women felt that the reports have made it more awkward to work with men (a little – 6%, very – 1%).

For both men and women, the **more junior** the person's role, the **more uncomfortable** they appear to be working with a person of the opposite gender.

“Offering advice to direct reports is fine, but I would be unlikely to adopt a mentoring role for a junior female employee due to the potential for power disparity issues, not just concern over sexual harassment (since I'd never do that anyway). It's just not worth the questions that could be raised. I'd seek to pass on to a suitable female mentor.”

## Men, women and #MeToo working together

The *New York Times* reported in November 2017<sup>2</sup> that one consequence of #MeToo in the workplace is that “some [men] said they planned to be a lot more careful in interacting with women because they felt that the line between friendliness and sexual harassment was too easy to cross. Others are struggling to reconcile how these behaviors could happen even among men who believe in equal rights.”



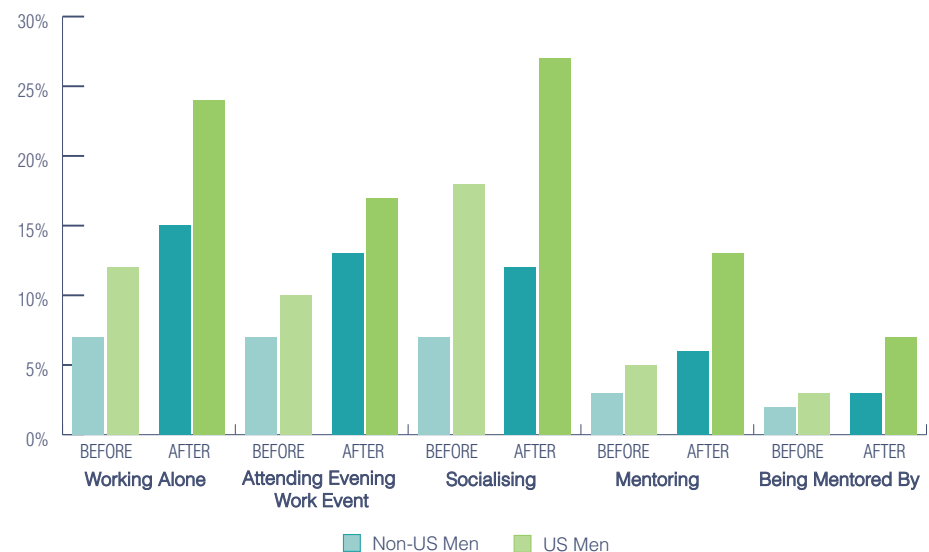
# What makes us uncomfortable?

**Working alone** (15%), **attending evening events** (13%) and **socialising** (12%) are the activities that cause men the **most discomfort**, especially following the #MeToo publicity.

When compared to the U.S. data, men living and working outside the U.S. remain more open to working with women, but the change since the #MeToo campaign is still marked.

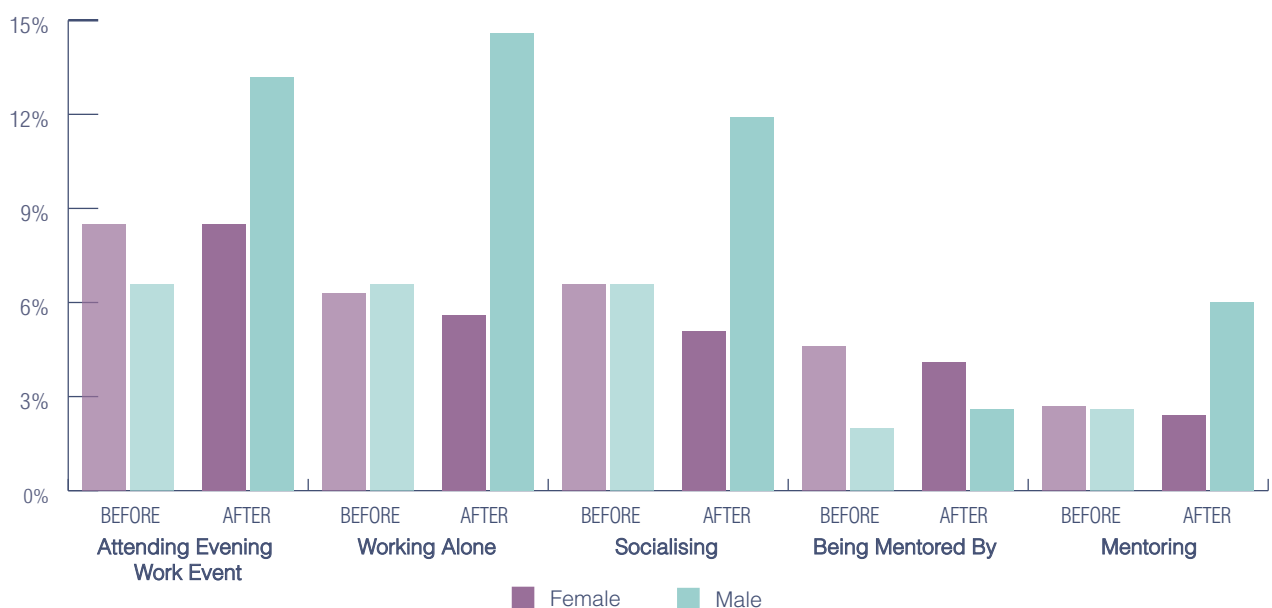
Twice as many men felt more uncomfortable mentoring a woman (6%, up from 3%), and being mentored by a woman (3%, up from 1%).

**Which of these activities - with a colleague of the opposite gender - makes you uncomfortable?**  
(BEFORE and AFTER highly publicised reports of sexual harrasment)



While largely unaffected by the sexual harassment reports, the women surveyed in our poll are currently most uncomfortable attending evening work events (8%), socialising (6%) and working alone (5%) with men.

**Which of these activities - with a colleague of the opposite gender - makes you uncomfortable?**  
(BEFORE and AFTER highly publicised reports of sexual harrasment)

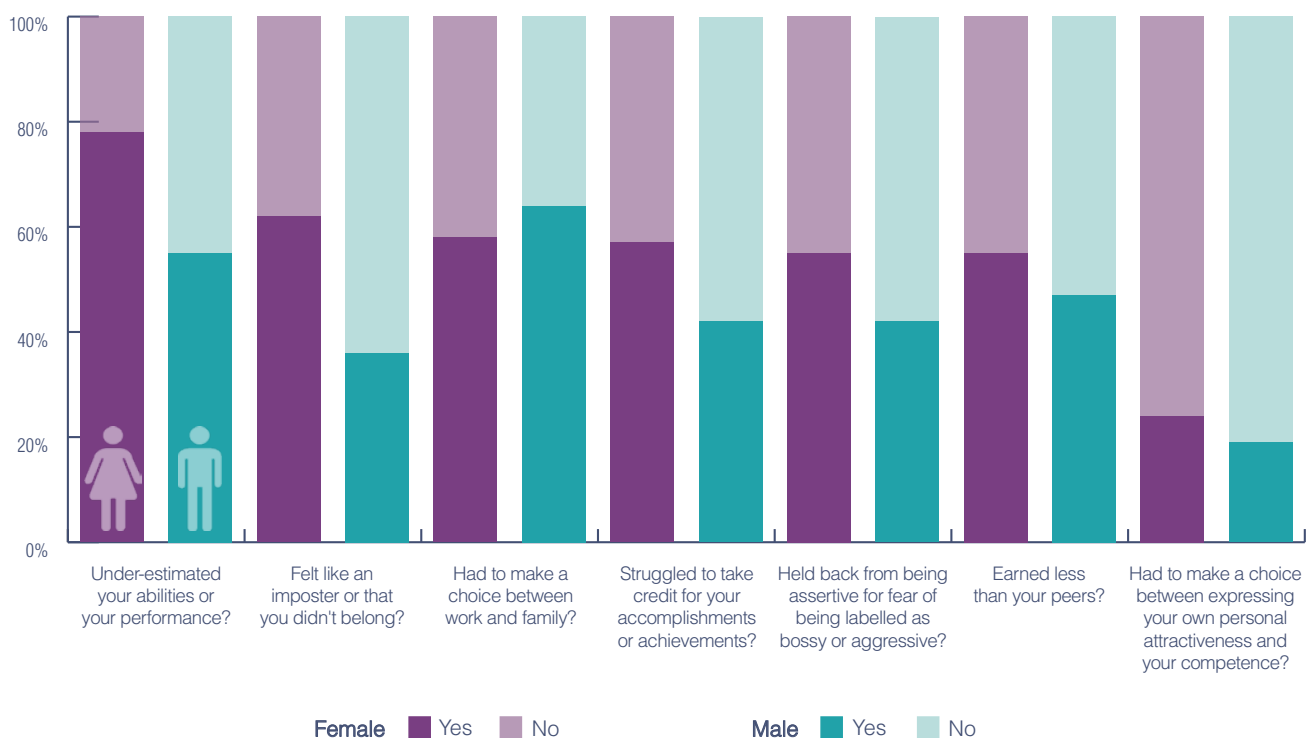


# Difficult choices and self-limiting beliefs aren't just a woman's world

It has been said that women face barriers to being regarded and rewarded as equals in the workplace. Some of these barriers are thought to arise from self-limiting beliefs and behaviours, and some result from unconscious (and conscious) biases and actions by others in the workplace.

We decided to test these ideas by asking women for their thoughts and experiences in the workplace and then took it one step further by asking the same of men.

## Thinking about the last year and your own work environment, would you say that you ever...?



What is evident is that **women** appear to experience **negative feelings** about themselves and practise **self-limiting behaviours** far too commonly, with half to two-thirds of surveyed women admitting that they have:

- > under-estimated their abilities or their performance (78%)
- > felt like an imposter or that they didn't belong (62%)
- > struggled to take credit for their own achievements or accomplishments (57%)
- > held back from being assertive for fear of being labelled bossy or aggressive (55%)
- > believed that they have had to make a choice between work and family (58%)
- > earned less than their peers (55%).

**Perhaps surprisingly, we also found that many men are impacted by these same experiences and self-limiting beliefs.**



# Food for thought

## Balance

An unexpected finding is that slightly more men than women (64% versus 58%) reported that they have had to choose between work and family. Society and the media may be making an incorrect assumption, that the burden of guilt suffered by working parents is shouldered more by the mother.

## Money

55% of the women and 47% of the men believe that they earn less than their peers. There is a strong focus in discussion on the (undeniably evident) gender pay gap, however, some men also feel that they're earning less than their peers.

## Physical Appearance

24% of the women reported having to make a choice between expressing their personal attractiveness and their competence. This finding supports the large body of social psychology research which attempts to unravel the complex relationships between perceived attractiveness, social competence, and sex-typing of the role or job competence being assumed.

In short, attractive people are generally considered to be more socially and job competent, but the effect can be contradictory for women if they are perceived as feminine or sexy. We were surprised by the relatively large 19% of men who also reported having to make a choice between expressing their personal attractiveness and their competence.

**These findings about self-beliefs and workplace perceptions provide some strong background into a discussion of women's and men's desires from their mentors.**



# What's a mentor to do?

When asked for the top five types of support they would like from a mentor, women and men expressed similar needs.

## Which of these would you MOST like a mentor to do if they were your mentor?

(Rate the five most important)



**A mentor can contribute enormously to a woman's success by legitimising their place in the organisation and profession – expressing confidence, challenging their female mentee's misconceptions, and reinforcing their support with sponsorship and connections.**

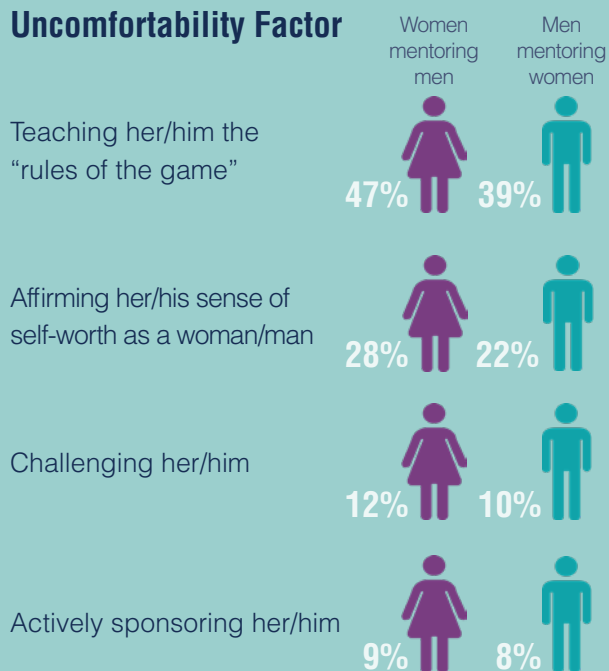
We are less comfortable than we thought with some aspects of mentoring other-gender colleagues

“I think cross-gender mentoring adds a really important dimension to the development of an organisation or workplace; however, only if there is a clear and explicit understanding of the role of mentor and mentee, which is supported by training to avoid cultural stereotypes and paternalism.”

The next part of our study explored mentoring relationships between men and women. We were interested to dive deeper into how comfortable and capable men and women really are with different aspects of mentoring.

At a surface level, only a small number of both men and women said they were uncomfortable mentoring the other gender. However, when we probed harder we found that there was a level of discomfort expressed around specific activities:

### Uncomfortability Factor



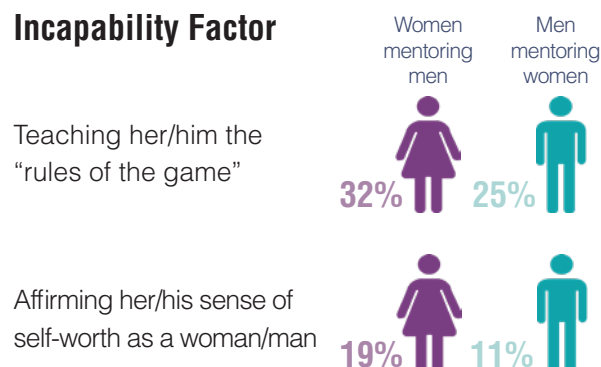
## Do we think we are capable of mentoring the other gender?

It is commonly believed that anyone that has managed people automatically makes an effective mentor. Sadly, this is untrue. Both men and women in our sample, for the most part, thought they were capable of mentoring the other gender, across almost all aspects.

We wonder if they are over-estimating their own capability?

Over 90% said they were capable of mentoring across a range of activities with just these exceptions:

### Incapability Factor



We invite both men and women to think again when it comes to mentoring.

Learning to put aside one's own biases and beliefs; the deep listening required to truly understand another's context and worldview; affirming, validating and helping to build a mentee's confidence are all highly nuanced skills.

**Masterful mentors know this is a never-ending journey of self-development.**



In their book “Athena Rising: How and Why Men Should Mentor Women”, Brad Johnson PhD (Professor of Psychology at the United States Naval

Academy and Faculty Associate at Johns Hopkins University) and David Smith PhD (Associate Professor of Sociology at the US Naval War College) detail 46 key messages that men should carry with them when they mentor women, to help their protégées overcome the conventional gender roles, unconscious biases and practical barriers that women face.

These include:

- > (Remember) She’s more like you than you think
- > Affirm that she belongs
- > Make sure she gets included
- > Challenge her! (and provide the support to go with it)
- > Open doors and put her name forward
- > Help her construct a rich constellation of career helpers
- > Hono(u)r her approach to work-life balance
- > Take every opportunity to build her confidence
- > Champion her assertiveness
- > Challenge her to take full credit for her accomplishments

Their call-to-action is clear:

“...you see examples of women being minimized, marginalized, cut out and derided, merely for their gender, nearly anywhere you look. The problem, of course, is that we – men, dudes, guys, fellas, bros ... gentlemen – rarely say much about it. And far too few of us actually do anything about it. Yet, we ignore this state of affairs to the detriment of our organizations; our own daughters, wives, and other women we care about; and even our own personal success and quality of life.

Strong mentoring relationships alter lives, not merely careers. ... the effects of strong mentoring are remarkable, profound, and enduring; mentoring relationships have the capacity to transform individuals, groups, organizations, and communities.”

## So how do we help each other?

We’re willing, we’re comfortable and we’re capable - or so we believe - which at the very least is a good place to start.

Let’s demystify some commonly held beliefs to clear the slate:

### The myth

Women are less likely to have mentors than men

**The truth** Both are equally likely to participate and seek out mentors — success, personal growth and the need for guidance is not gender based.

### The myth

The best mentor is someone of the same gender

**The truth** It’s all contextual and great results can be achieved from either combination. If a woman is returning to work from maternity leave, then a female mentor is probably best placed to assist with her challenges. However, if a woman is working her way up the ranks, then a male influence may be best for her pursuits.

To embark on effective cross-gender mentoring relationships, we need to understand each other and adapt to our unique gender traits.

## Women who mentor men

Men want challenge from the get-go — so be prepared for this. Listen to their concerns and target questions that get them thinking. They equally need to know they’re supported and understood, but the findings suggest a higher tendency to want to “get down to work” quickly.

## Men who mentor women

Make them feel comfortable. Take the time to understand them, build a strong emotional connection and provide encouragement upfront. Once established — go hard! They equally want to be challenged but need a safe environment to do so, as they will more than likely have those pesky self-limiting beliefs sitting in the corner.

# Top Tips for Cross Gender Mentors

1

Let it be well-known at work (and at home) that you are in a formal, purposeful mentoring relationship, working within a structure and with an agreed, explicit Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement.

2

Seek to understand your mentee's world, both the patterns of stereotypes and gender dynamics to which they're likely to be subject and their unique circumstances and obstacles. Get to know her/him, and ask for their observations and opinions about their reality.

3

Be aware of the motives, biases and stereotypes you hold and look out for them in others too. Challenge them in your own and others' thinking and actions, not just with your mentee but in everyday work and life.

For example:

**Women**, don't assume that your male mentee is happy being the "full-time family breadwinner" with a stay-at-home wife.

**Men**, give your full attention to the words of a female colleague and correct anyone who co-opts or wrongly assigns her ideas to another (male) person.

Beware of the power difference between you and your mentee and avoid taking a "fatherly" or "motherly" approach to the relationship.

4

Encourage your mentee to step up and take on new opportunities. Express your confidence and appropriately challenge his or her doubts. Help them see their own strengths and frame their experiences (including failures) in terms of learning and growth.

5

Behave in an overtly professional and open manner; meet in public or an open area, schedule meetings during the day (such as breakfast or lunch) rather than the evening. This will disable innuendo and assumptions about your relationship.

6

Avoid reflexively giving advice, particularly unsolicited advice. Instead, prompt and challenge your mentee to explore their strengths, unique situations and the obstacles they face and come up with their own solution for which they feel responsible.



# Where to now for mentoring women?

The number of women in senior roles, who can act as role models and more importantly mentors, is far below what is needed to close the gap at senior levels. In male-dominated industries and workplaces, where female mentors are at best scarce, **women need men to “step up” and take on more mentorships, not less.** Some men may need to move past their discomfort.

Several studies have revealed that women experience difficulty accessing informal mentors<sup>345</sup>. This is where formal, structured mentoring programs come in. Not only do they provide equal access to mentors — well-designed, programmatic mentoring is the solution to avoiding the discomfort that participants have voiced their concerns over.

The risk or opportunity for sexual harassment is greatly reduced when a third party (such as a program administrator) selects and facilitates the mentoring relationship. Self-selection and informal mentoring are more likely to lead to (or be perceived as) inappropriate intentions or behaviours.

In addition, structured mentoring programs typically include explicit discussion and agreement about mutual expectations, formal rules of engagement and avenues for seeking outside help to manage or terminate the relationship — effectively creating a “safe” and unambiguous space for mentoring to take place.



## Women need to

- > **STOP** leaving mentoring to chance
- > **CONTINUE** to apply for formal mentoring programs
- > **START** to seek out mentors proactively and request mentoring and sponsorship opportunities



## Men need to

- > **STOP** waiting for female mentees to be assigned to them
- > **CONTINUE** to volunteer for formal mentoring programs
- > **START** to seek out female mentees, learn more about what women want from their mentors and how to mentor them effectively



## Organisations need to

- > **STOP** hoping that women will find their own mentors
- > **CONTINUE** putting more formal programs in place and encourage women to apply
- > **START** making mentoring for women a natural part of organisational life

“If I want mentors in senior positions in the mining industry (the industry I work in), it's not always possible to find a woman.”

A well-designed program grounded on organisational objectives, gives purpose to the mentoring process and makes challenge, growth and learning not just acceptable, but expected. Considered screening and training of participants and matching of mentor/mentee partners means that the male mentor is seen as an experienced professional companion in a relationship with aims and objectives, rather than a “white knight” coming to save the damsel in distress.

## References

- 1 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2017; <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2017/dataexplorer/#economy=AUS> accessed 10/05/2018: *Educational attainment* includes: Literacy rate; Enrolment in primary education; Enrolment in secondary education, and; Enrolment in tertiary education. Australia ranks 1st globally in all these categories. *Economic Participation and Opportunity* subcategories: Labour force participation (56th); Wage equality for similar work, by survey (62nd); Estimated earned income (63rd); Legislators, senior officials and managers (34th); Professional and technical workers (1st), *Political Empowerment* encompasses: women in parliament (Aust ranks 45th); women in ministerial positions (43rd); Years in the last 50 with female head of state (35th) *Health and Survival* relates to: Sex ratio at birth (1st); Healthy life expectancy (112th)
- 2 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/10/business/men-at-work-wonder-sexual-harassment.html>
- 3 Noe, R.A. (1988), “An Investigation of the Determinants of Successful Assigned Mentoring Relationships”, *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 457-79.
- 4 Cox, T.H. (1994), *Cultural Diversity in Organizations: Theory, Research and Practice*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- 5 Ragins, B. and Cotton, J. (1999), “Mentor Functions and Outcomes: A Comparison of Men and Women in Formal and Informal Mentoring Relationships”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 84 No. 4, pp. 529-50

“I think there is so much to learn and the more distinct the mentor/mentee are from each other the more there is potentially to gain from the relationship.

The power of seeing something from a **different perspective** cannot be underestimated.”



ART of  
**MENTORING**

At Art of Mentoring we believe mentoring enriches people's lives and strengthens their communities, and that every person, no matter where they are, deserves a chance to enjoy the rich benefits of mentoring done well.

We combine evidence-based mentoring expertise with the latest technology to enable associations to develop and deliver high-quality, cost-effective mentoring programs.

We service clients around the world from our base in Australia.

To learn more about mentoring, download free resources and find out how to make mentoring work in your company, please visit our website.



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Thank you to all the people who took the time to respond to our survey.  
By sharing your experience, you have helped us support the continuous  
improvement of mentoring program delivery for diversity.

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