Theses and Graduate Projects

10-27-2003

Black Women Leaders: The Value of Being in a Mentoring Relationship

Sara B. Masters

Augsburg College

Follow this and additional works at: https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd

Part of the Leadership Studies Commons

Black Women Leaders: The Value of Being in a Mentoring

Relationship

Sara B. Masters

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Leadership

Augsburg College
Minneapolis, Minnesota

2003

Master of Arts in Leadership
Augsburg College
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Non-thesis Project of

Sara B. Masters

has been approved by the Review Committee for the Non-thesis Project

requirement for the Master of Arts in Leadership degree.

Date of Non-thesis Completed: ___10-27-03___

Committee: _____Velma J. Fashbrook_____
Advisor

_____Norma L. Noonan_____
Reader

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Velma Lashbrook and Dr. Norma Noonan for their time and help in finishing this paper.

I would also like to recognize my husband, Jason, and my mom, Joyce, for pushing me forward to get this paper written and this degree finished.

And lastly, I would like to thank all of my classmates in the MAL program. I learned so much from you all!

Abstract

Black Women Leaders: The Value of Being in a Mentoring

Relationship

Sara B. Masters

2003

 _X_   Non-thesis (ML597) Project

The intent of this research is to find out more about black women leaders and mentoring. It is clear that black women are underrepresented in leadership positions in this country and in the Twin Cities metro area. To increase the number of black women in leadership roles, it is important to find out from those who have succeeded, how they did it. Mentoring has been identified as an effective means of leadership development in organizations. There has been very little research done specifically on black women who have been mentored and how these relationships have contributed to their career success. Through case studies, it was found that a mentoring relationship is very significant in a black woman's career advancement. This paper looked at the many benefits of having a mentor and the criteria for selecting a mentor. The results also indicated that having more than one mentor is highly recommended if one wants to get ahead. Furthermore, it was found that the women in this study did not have difficulty in finding a mentor.

Table of Contents

Introduction

If one takes a look at the racial make-up of organizational leaders in the Twin Cities, there seems to be a shortage of black women in top positions. This is not just a perception. There is a non-profit research and advisory services organization called Catalyst whose mission is to help advance women in business. In their 2002 Census of Women Corporate Officers and Top Earners of the Fortune 500, they found that 15.7% of the corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies were women (Juncos, 2002). They also found that women of color constituted only 1.6% of the total number of corporate officers. To increase the number of black women in leadership roles, it is important to learn from those who have succeeded how they got to where they are today. These women certainly did not do it all by themselves, and, maybe, having been mentored had something to do with it. Because mentoring has been identified as an effective means of leadership development in organizations (Sosik and Lee, 2002), this paper explores mentoring and how significant a mentoring relationship is for a black woman's advancement.

There has been very little research done on black women leaders. Bell (1993) says that research on women in management is mostly done with white women and excludes women of color. Thomas and Gabarro (1999) report that, "most of the literature on executive development and leadership in the past 10 years has been silent on the issue of race" (p. 3). Because of these deficiencies, the research on black women who have been mentored and how these relationships affect their advancement is rare.

Through case studies, this paper looks at mentoring in-depth to discover what the value of being in a mentoring relationship is from the perspective of 10 black women. This information was gathered by personal interviews with black women leaders who have been mentored in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. Interpretive narrative analysis was used to identify themes in the mentoring experiences of these 10 women. This paper also reviews the literature on mentoring in order to cover the definition of mentoring, the benefits of mentoring, the different levels of mentoring, and the major challenges facing black women in advancing their careers.

Literature Review

Mentoring Defined

The word mentor comes from Greek mythology where mentor was Odysseus's trusted counselor, in whose guise Athena became the guardian and teacher of his son Telemachus while he was away (American Heritage, 2002).

For the purposes of this paper, the following definition provided by Zey (1991) will be used: "A mentor is a person who oversees the career and development of another person, usually a junior, through teaching, counseling, providing psychological support, protecting, and at times promoting or sponsoring" (p. 7).

In other words, by taking those less experienced under their wing and sharing their contacts, wisdom, experience, making other paths known, and accelerating journeys, mentors are catalysts in the development of future leaders

and heroes (Doyle, 2000). Being mentored gives access to the inside of the organization by gaining exposure and support some otherwise might not have had.

Mentoring plays an important role in career advancement (Kalbfleisch and Davies, 1991; Simonetti, Ariss and Martinez, 1999; Thomas, 2001). Zey (1991) adds, "A major way to advance in an organization is to receive correct information about one's job, profession, career, and organization" (p. 14).

Most of the previous research on mentoring has not included the experiences of black women. Either the race of the women in the studies were not given or they were not studied at all. Thomas and Gabarro (1999) say that most of the literature on executive development and leadership in the past 20 years has been silent on the issue of race. They think this is because there were so few minority senior managers and executives in the companies where much of the research was done. Bell, Denton and Nkomo (1993) state, "Research about women in management has generally referred to white women to the exclusion of women of color" (p. 125). They stress that there are deficiencies in the current knowledge of women managers because of this narrow focus.

For a person to be successful in his or her role as a mentor, Collins (1983) gives five criteria that she found in her research to be necessary if one is to be defined as a mentor, or one who can provide upward mobility to a professional career. First, this person must be higher up on the organizational ladder. Second, they must be an authority in their field. Third, they must have influence. Fourth, they need to be interested in their would-be protégé's growth and

development. And lastly, they must be willing to commit their time and emotions to the relationship (p. 7).

Even if a mentor meets all of these criteria, it does not guarantee the relationship will be successful. Wickman and Sjoden (1997) found that there are four basic traits present in most protégés who are successful in a mentoring relationship. They are: shows respect for the mentor's time; takes action on information provided by the mentor; shows respect for the mentor's efforts to open new doors; and passes on the gift of mentoring by taking on a protégé.

In summary, in order for a mentoring relationship to be successful there must be a mentor who has strong interpersonal skills, can give upward mobility to ones career, and provides advice, counsel, and support (Collins, 1983). There must also be a protégé who is receptive to feedback and coaching, assumes responsibility for their own growth and development, and seeks challenging assignments and new responsibilities (Murray, 2001).

Benefits of Mentoring

Research supports the notion that mentoring can catapult you to wherever you want to go. Moore (1986) said:

> Research indicates that people with mentors earn more at a younger age, are more likely to follow a career plan, are more satisfied with their work, get more challenging job assignments, and gain a larger perspective of the organization and more visibility and job mobility (p. 57).

So the benefits of being mentored are not only on a career level, but on a personal level too. Zey (1991) says for many protégés, they see more changes than just in their skills and position. By being mentored, they can see a

"fundamental transformation in the way they perceive themselves, their careers, their relationships to the organization, and their very potential as people" (Zey, 1991, p. 63). In their research, Gibson, Tesone, and Buchalski (2000) concluded that mentoring is a natural part of leadership and mentoring of any kind is beneficial.

The protégé is not the only one who benefits in this kind of relationship. Zey (1991) and Phillips-Jones (1982) give some reasons why a person would mentor another. They say that a mentor can benefit by getting more work done with the protégé's help. There is a also a certain prestige of passing knowledge to those under you. A mentor is also a developer of talent—a true sign of a leader. Mentors may also develop loyal and dependable subordinates who are trustworthy. Mentors also see themselves as giving back and maybe repaying past debts.

Not only do protégés and mentors benefit, organizations where mentoring takes place, benefit. Among other things, mentoring can help reduce turnover in these organizations, increase productivity, and help with planning for managerial succession (Zey, 1991).

Levels of Mentoring

In his book, Zey (1991) identifies four levels of mentoring. Mentoring is a gradual process and the relationship takes time to grow. During Level I, the Teaching Function, the protégé is usually taught the job, given an organizational

map, and provided with career guidance. This enables the protégé to be successful in their current job.

Level II is the Personal Support Function and this level is more motivational and directive than Level I. The mentor interacts with the protégé on a more personal basis. Protégés can usually expect psychological support, confidence building and assistance with their personal life during this time.

During Level III, the Organizational Intervention level, the mentor assumes a more active role and attempts to influence the organization in the protégé's favor. This is where the mentor gives protection, markets the protégé, and gives access to resources.

Level IV is what most protégés want from their mentors. At the Promotions Direct and Indirect level, the protégé ascends to higher positions in the organization, directly and indirectly. They do this directly by a getting a bigger title and an expanded job function and indirectly by getting into in-house training programs, management programs, and obtaining prestigious appointments with professional journals and boards. Zey (1991) says, "The ultimate rationale for entering a mentoring relationship seems to be its ability to ease his [the protégé's] ascent to higher organizational positions" (p. 50).

Barriers Black Women Face

Even though there are more and more black women leaders today, they still contend with some serious issues. The black woman's particular difficulties in the business world include struggling with stereotypical images, forming

undeveloped roles, and having to prove their competence over and over (Bell, 1990). They are forming undeveloped roles by being the first or only black woman to hold an upper management position in their company. Because of this, they do not have any role models to turn to for support or guidance. Many black women are unable to identify internal mentors because they are isolated within their companies; they do not know what is going on in the organization because they do not have access to the information they need (Steele, 1995).

Catalyst (1998) identified 14 of the most powerful barriers to female career advancement, and among those were negative mentoring and self-selection. This is where women move into staff areas instead of line positions. Line positions are revenue generating positions, therefore they are looked upon as more prestigious and are monitored more closely by senior management. In staff positions, there are not many chances for advancement or visibility within the organization.

Another barrier was a lack of mentoring and exclusion from informal career networks. Through mentoring and being a part of career networks, men have typically learned the unwritten rules of success (p. xxi). If women are not being mentored or networking, they are not learning the rules of the "game," and therefore do not advance as fast as men. In her article, Bell (1990) stresses:

> Without powerful advocates, the [black] women often find themselves omitted from important organizational networks and isolated from people who can help hone their professional skills. Consequently, they are forced to navigate uncharted waters when seeking ways to fulfill their career goals (p. 460).

It seems to all come down to having access. Zey (1991) has found that women and minorities have difficulty moving up because they cannot gain entry into the "old boy's network," and, to be a member, gives you exposure to top management and access to information about "the right way of doing things." He thinks these are all necessary to climb up the corporate ladder. Since white males usually hold the power in many organizations, they usually seek others like themselves to mentor. This makes it difficult for women and minorities to establish strong ties with these men (Moore, 1986).

Thomas and Gabarro (1999) also found barriers that minority managers encounter on their way up. One is the prevalence of prejudice. There is still that underlying prejudice that minority managers face on a day-to-day basis. Second, there are issues of comfort and risk. It may seem risky for some to help someone outside their race and they may not be comfortable with it. It goes back to what Moore was saying about those in power usually seek out others like themselves to be their protégés. And, third, some think there is difficulty in identifying high-potential minorities. Meaning, historically minority managers have not been given the proper guidance and support, or the high visibility assignments to become prepared to take on new responsibility so that they can advance.

Case Studies

Methodology

This qualitative study is based on face-to-face interviews with 10 black women in leadership positions in the Twin Cities metropolitan area in Minnesota who have been a protégé in at least one mentoring relationship. The research process was approved by Augsburg College's Institutional Review Board (see the approval letter in Appendix A). Potential study participants were identified through referrals from their colleagues and acquaintances who were aware of these women and their positions. An attempt was made to contact participants with different positions in a variety of business sectors.

An e-mail (see Appendix B) was sent to 20 women to introduce the study and the researcher, explore their interest in participating in the study, and notify them that they would receive a follow-up call in the next couple of days. During the call, potential interviewees were asked questions to determine if they were qualified according to the following criteria:

1. Works at a non-profit, for-profit, government, or educational institution.

2. Is in or has been in at least one mentoring relationship as a protégé.

3. Has the title of Manager, Vice President, President, Director, or the equivalent.

4. Self-identifies herself as black/African American.

Of the 20 notified, only 10 participated in the study. Those who were excluded either did not meet the criteria listed above or the researcher had a hard time contacting them by phone. Those who met the study criteria and

agreed to a face-to-face interview were sent a consent form (see Appendix C) and a list of questions (see Appendix D). The questions delved into their experiences during their mentoring relationship, how they benefited and how it affected their career advancement. Questions also explored what aspect of the mentoring process was most effective, along with any difficulties they had. Each of the participants were asked to choose a time and a place for the face-to-face interview. They were asked to set aside at least an hour of their time. At the time of the interview, participants were asked to sign the consent form, and the researcher answered any questions they had. Each interview was audio taped for clarity and accuracy of analysis.

The researcher used interpretive narrative analysis to identify themes about successful black women who have been mentored and the common experiences these 10 women have had. The investigator conducted all of the interviews which took place from April 2003 through June of 2003, and provided the thematic analysis. In the following report, the organizations were not named and the participants' names were changed to protect their privacy.

Sample

The 10 black women who participated in the study work in companies and organizations in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. Four women work in the for-profit arena; three work for non-profits; two are involved in politics; and one is an educator. All have been mentored in their careers, and all have had more than one mentor. Their ages range from the early 30s to over 60. The

participants' responsibilities included human resource management, accounting, policy/lawmaking, philanthropic leadership, promoting diversity, teaching, consulting, motivation, and overall management.

Findings

Through interviews, information was obtained on how these women formed mentoring relationships, what problems they had in finding a mentor, who their mentors were, the role of race in their relationship, the significance of their mentoring relationships, and how they are giving back what they have learned from their mentors. Results in each of these areas are discussed below.

Forming a Mentoring Relationship

To determine how and why these 10 women entered into mentoring relationships, the following questions were asked:

- How did you get involved in this mentoring relationship? (Was it an informal or formal pairing? Did you seek them out or did they find you?)
- At what period of your career did you enter into this relationship and what motivated you to find a mentor at that time?
- When you started thinking about getting a mentor, how did you hope to benefit from the relationship?

Ann

Ann is the only manager in the sample. She was paired with her mentor through her organization. She did not necessarily seek out her mentor, but feels that a mentor is "nice to have." When she was paired, she hoped to benefit by understanding the organization and getting different points of view and perspectives. She thinks, "For many blacks, they do not have people to point to for reference." She says, "You need someone to help you navigate the corporate culture, no matter who you are. Information is key."

Dawn

Dawn's position is Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for a for-profit company. When she entered into her first mentoring relationship, it was a formal pairing. The company implied that if she did participate, they would consider her for promotions in the future. From this relationship, she hoped to get help with learning how to say no, balancing family and work, and learning how to stop being so hard on herself.

Nora

Nora is Vice President at a non-profit organization. Her mentoring relationships happened naturally and informally. She found her mentors through their openness to teaching, exploring and challenging her, or allowing her to push and challenge them. Nora recognized the value of having a good working relationship with these men who were higher up on the corporate ladder. She

wanted to sharpen her skills so that she would be politically savvy within the organization. Nora's motivation for tapping into these men as mentors was that they were in senior positions in the organization and had much insight. Since they were a part of the majority, she gained a new perspective on the organization.

Kayla

Kayla is Assistant Vice President for a for-profit company. She came into the company through a management training program in which she was paired with a person with more experience. Through this match, she hoped to gain additional perspectives because she did not want to confine herself only to her area of discipline. Mentoring was beneficial to Kayla because she has a natural tendency to seek out people who can answer questions about issues and provide their advice on situations.

Nicole

Nicole is Founder/Principal of her own consulting company. She had many mentors during her career, but one relationship really resonates with her. This mentor actually contacted Nicole and, because they both had similar visions and interests, their informal relationship began. She hoped to learn how her mentor did her research since Nicole was starting her own doctoral work. She also wanted to study her mentor's style and how she interacted with people and develop her career.

Tracy

Tracy is the President of a non-profit organization. Her mentoring experiences have always been informal and she includes people who did not even know they were mentoring her in her list of mentors.   Earlier in her career, she had a mentor who was her boss. She hoped to gain more knowledge from this person so that she could take over her boss' job when she retired. Tracy believes that she does not have to reinvent the wheel, and that is why mentoring is so important to her.

Tasha

Tasha works in the political arena. Her mentor sought her out because he was determined to get her into politics and wanted her to have as much information about politics as she could get. She agreed to this relationship because she says, "There is no need to reinvent the wheel. That's the bottom line. There is the piece you need to experience yourself but you don't have to experience it all because someone else has gone through it." The benefit she hoped to get from this mentor was just knowledge. She always asks herself, "What will I be able to learn that I don't already know?" She knows she will learn something as long as she is open to learning.

Mary

Mary is an Executive Vice President and Dean at a local college. Her mentoring relationship developed on its own. She was not seeking a mentor at

the time, and her mentor was not seeking someone to mentor. This informal mentoring relationship came to life when both of them worked at the same organization and became friends. Mary wanted help in strengthening her natural abilities and gifts. She also wanted her self-esteem and confidence level raised. It was important to her to have someone she trusted and with whom she could talk about anything. She wanted to be herself with this mentor, and not be judged but helped.

Ruby

Ruby was the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees for a non-profit foundation. The mentoring relationships she had were all informal and they always found her. From these relationships she hoped to find guidance through her life and her mentors had the experiences to help her. She never had "sit-down" meetings with her mentors. She had what she called "hallway mentors." She was mentored whenever she saw them in passing and when she had a need.

Talia

Talia is an elected official who works in city government. Her most significant relationship was happenstance. She thinks it was informal to her mentor and more formal to her. Her mentor needed a successor and Talia was willing and able to learn from her mentor when nobody else wanted the job.

From this relationship she hoped to gain knowledge on doing the job so that she could take over from her mentor when she left. Talia is a learner and gravitates toward people who know what she wants to know.

Is it Difficult to Find a Mentor?

To learn if these 10 women found it difficult to find a mentor, the following question was asked: Did you find it difficult to find a mentor? Why or why not?

No one interviewed found it difficult finding mentors. They either were fixed up with a mentor through a formal program or the relationship just happened. They all know the importance of gaining knowledge and gravitate towards those who could help them advance their career.

Mary, the educator of the group, was confident that if she had to seek out a mentor, she would not have had any problems finding one because there were always people in her life who started out as role models who could be mentors.

Ruby believes that, because she really enjoys engaging with people, it was not difficult for her. But, she says that maybe it would have been difficult if she was not as outgoing.

In Talia's earlier years, she did not find it difficult to find a mentor, but she says that is not the case now. The women that she wants as mentors today have extremely busy lives and she is not sure that they know how to mentor. These women are trailblazers and some need to learn how to share their knowledge. Ann felt the same way saying that if she had to search for a mentor, she thinks it would not be easy.

Meet the Mentors

To learn about these 10 women's mentors, the following questions were asked:

- What criteria did you use in selecting a mentor?

- Tell me about your mentor (e.g., title, gender, race, where are they located). How has race played a role in your mentoring relationship?

Table 1 summarizes mentors' gender, race and the criteria the protégés used in selecting in a mentor.

Table 1

Name	Gender	Race	Criteria
Dawn	Male	White	Bright, strong, and has interpersonal skills.
Nora	Male	White	Personal integrity and true to one's self.
Kayla	Male	White	Interested in seeing others succeed, good human relations skills, and not arrogant about their success.
Ruby	Male	White	Someone she wants to be like, smart, and knowledgeable.
Tracy	Female	Black	Knowledge
Mary	Female	Black	Trustworthy, can be herself with, and can share anything with.
Talia	Female	Black	Walks their talk, has strength in adverse conditions, clearheaded, has compassion, enhances her strengths, someone who challenges her, and she respects them.
Ann	Female	Black	Person she can be real with.
Nicole	Female	White	Is real, has vision, cares about people, going somewhere, and has integrity.
Tasha	Male	Black	Has the time, is flexible, open to hearing what she has to say, and must keep everything confidential.

Of the mentors identified, five women had mentors who were white, and the other five had mentors who were black. The gender of their mentors was

distributed the same way. However, mentors were most likely to be white males or black females.

For those who had white males as their mentors, they thought it worked to their advantage because they worked in organizations where white males were in charge. Their mentors provided them with a perspective that they did not have.

The three women with black females as mentors felt that having a mentor like them was beneficial. As Mary said, "They [black women] can sympathize and there are things you don't have to explain to someone who is black that you would have to explain otherwise. They know what it is to be a black woman." Talia agreed by saying, "Race does play a role. Many of the things we go through are unlike many other women. We have experiences that we go through that are different than other cultures."

Significance of the Relationships

To determine the significance of the mentor relationship to these 10 women's careers, the following questions were asked:

- When you met/meet with your mentor, what kinds of things did/do you talk about? Can you give some examples of the kind of support you received from your mentor? (What kinds of knowledge? Career guidance? Were any doors opened for you?)

- How did/do you benefit from being mentored?

- What was the best advice you received from your mentor?

- Do you think you could have gotten where you are today without a mentor? Why or why not?

Dawn

Dawn's mentor started out their relationship by asking her what she needed from the relationship. When they met, they would use the time getting what she needed done. He would give her balanced feedback and examples of how he handled certain situations. She got to see his world and he saw hers. He pushed her and challenged her—in the right ways.

One of the benefits that she saw from this relationship was that she did a much deeper, introspective evaluation of herself than what she would have done without a mentor. The best advice she received from him was to stop being so hard on herself.

When asked if she would have gotten where she is today without a mentor, Dawn says no. She says that, "Mentors come in totally different ways at totally different times. No one person has the skill set that is needed at any given time." She looks at mentors as foundation blocks or pillars. "They hold you upright and point you in the right direction, and support you." She doesn't think there is one person who could continually do that, that's why she thinks you need more than one mentor.

Nora

Doors were opened for Nora when she gained more access to executives in the organization. She also gained credibility and visibility because of her mentoring relationships.

She found that when she said something, people looked at it as "her agenda," especially around race issues (or women's issues). Nora learned that she could use her mentors to advocate her position. By doing this, her executive mentors looked to support it, and people thought them to be impartial and objective.

Nora also benefited in other ways. She gained confidence and became more self-assured about taking the unpopular position and not personalizing it when a decision was made that was different than what she proposed. This was the best advice that she received. Her mentors helped her look at the realities in the organization and made her look at them from a personal perspective as well as a professional perspective. Because of these benefits, Nora feels where she is today is the result of being mentored.

Kayla

Kayla believes that the act of mentorship itself does not open doors. She says it is how you use the relationship and how you personally grow from the relationship that opens doors. She says, "Sometimes it's all about who you know, but sometimes it's how you impressed that person you got to know."

Because Kayla is an intellectually curious person who does not like the easy way out, and believes you never stop learning, the mentoring relationship benefited her. It gave her additional perspectives about the organization and she learned not to define her scope by her job description.

The best advice that she received was how to fine-tune her outgoing personality so that it is more effective, and how to manage her assertiveness in a way that was less threatening. Because of this, she is known to communicate things in a very professional way and "the higher up you go, the more how you say things count." She does not think she would be where she is today without mentors. She is not a loner and likes to ask questions to make sure that she is on the right track.

Ruby

Ruby's mentors always encouraged her to think bigger and to pursue the things that challenged her abilities. She was also told to make the best use of opportunities that came her way and if she did this, it would open doors for her. This was a consistent message from all her mentors.

She does not think she could have gotten where she is today without her mentors. She thinks she would have gotten discouraged without them. She says "Mentors help you get across the bridge."

Tracy

Tracy feels the same way as all of the other woman and does not think she would have gotten where she is today without mentors. She's had many mentors and learns from everyone. Through mentoring, she perfected her coaching and leadership skills. From her mentors she learned that "You need to find something that you're passionate about and figure out how to get paid for it. Then you will be happy and you will make a significant contribution to the world."

Mary

From her mentor, Mary received advice on how to deal with certain situations, and received help on making decisions that dealt with her career. Her mentor also challenged her to go beyond where she was. Mary says that she also learned to acknowledge where God is in her life and realized that she does not have to make decisions alone or worry about where she is going from here. She definitely thinks her mentor enhanced her life and says her experiences were richer because of her mentor.

Talia

When Talia was preparing to take over her manager's job, trial and error was the way she learned. Talia says her mentor threw her into situations with no preparation, and afterwards her mentor would quiz her on what she saw and learned. Talia thinks that was her mentor's way to measure where she needed to insert herself or her knowledge. Her mentor also helped her to identify where

the power structure was at meetings, with whom she should be developing relationships, and how her presence at the table helped carve a place for herself.

The best advice she received from her mentor was to believe in herself and pay attention to her inner voice because it generally is the right voice. She says that this is one of the hardest things to do.

Like most of the women, she does not think she could have gotten where she is today without a mentor because her mentor not only mentored her, but gave her an opportunity of a lifetime and Talia thinks she probably would not have gotten that opportunity without her. She learned that her work effort really means something and it does pays off. She says, "Be willing to do what nobody else is willing to do."

Ann

When she meets with her mentor, they talk about everything—kids, relationships and work—general topics. Her mentor gives career advice, but more so on how to deal with associates and day-to-day issues.

By being mentored, she feels that she has moved up more quickly. She learned what jobs were deemed by management to be more prestigious. She also was told by her mentor what other people's perceptions of her were, which she felt was key because she feels perceptions mean more than reality.

Even though Ann is being mentored and feels like she is benefiting from it, she thinks she would have gotten where she is today without a mentor. She does note that she doesn't feel like she is very far along in her career path.

Nicole

Nicole says her mentor helped her with her path. She also helped her through the tough Ph.D. process so that she came out of it with her own self in tact. Even though this mentor is no longer her mentor, she feels that she is still benefiting from that relationship today. She got what she wanted and so much more. One piece of advice that she did receive that she still follows today is to recreate herself every five years (show up in a different way).

Nicole thinks she would not have gotten to where she is today without a mentor. She's had mentors all along the way, and does not know how people navigate through their lives without them.

Tasha

Through mentoring, Tasha says that she learned that she could do anything she wanted. She was also shown that the door can open if she wants it to open. She also received the advice to stay true to herself no matter what others want from her.

But even with this help, Tasha says she would have gotten where she is today without a mentor. This is because she feels that this is a calling. However, she says it would not have been as easy at this point in her life. Even so, she does recognize the benefit mentoring has made on her life.

<u>Summary</u>

All of these women perceive that their mentors made it easier to advance. The primary ways that they assisted were:

- Giving access to upper management,

- Instilling self-confidence,

- Providing new perspectives, and

- Presenting more opportunities and challenges.

Giving Back

To find out how and why these women are giving back what they learned from their mentors, the following questions were asked:

- Are you (would you) mentoring another black women? Why or why not? How have you (or would you) benefit?

- Do you have any other mentor or support relationships that have facilitated your career?

- What advice would you give young black women about finding and developing a mentoring relationship?

Many people see mentoring as giving back or passing on knowledge that was learned from another. All of the women interviewed are mentoring others and have much advice to give to those who are not being mentored or are thinking about finding a mentor. They also see themselves benefiting alongside the protégés because of the relationship.

Dawn mentors because she believes "iron sharpens iron." She grows because she is helping someone else grow. Kayla says that "helping others grow and develop is a wonderful experience and a very fulfilling and rewarding one." Tracy echoes that statement by saying that she learns, and she likes to see people grow and develop. It also allows her to perfect her coaching and leadership skills. And it is enough for Tasha to know that she gave a seed to someone to grow. Ruby added, "It is flattering when someone thinks you have something to offer them." Talia gave an interesting illustration of why people should mentor others:

> Think of yourself as the body of an octopus. Each person you mentor is a tentacle into the world. You want as many tentacles into the world as you possibly can. When you give, you also receive, and you don't know when you are going to be on the receiving end of that giving.

To summarize all their advice about finding and developing a mentoring relationship, the overall message was: get one, find one, and you need one. For black women, Nora advocates having at least one mentoring relationship with a male who is at the senior level. She says that those are the individuals who make the decisions, they drive the dynamics of the organization and they are the leaders. Others said that people should not limit themselves to their own ethnicity. They might be losing out.

They also advise others to be realistic in their expectations and be clear on what they want from the relationship. They also encourage people to be mentored by someone whom they trust and who is connected to where they want to go. For example, if one wants to go into politics or be an educator, find a

mentor who works in politics or at an educational institution. Approach someone already doing the job you want and ask them if they are willing to be a mentor.

Conclusions

This research intended to explore the value of being in a mentoring relationship and how this affects the career advancement of black women. Based on the findings, we can conclude that:

- A mentoring relationship is very significant in a black woman's career advancement. Each of the women interviewed have benefited because they have had mentors throughout their career. Without mentors, many said that they would not have gotten where they are today.

- Most black women experience few difficulties finding mentors. Through formal programs or by developing informal relationships, most of these women have found several mentors to help their careers. As they rise closer to the top it becomes somewhat more difficult to develop appropriate mentor relationships, because potential mentors are so busy.

- The criteria for selecting a mentor include: is knowledgeable in their field, has strong interpersonal skills, is interested in the growth of others, is able to challenge in the right ways, and has integrity.

- The primary benefits of having a mentor include: visibility and credibility with senior executives, new perspectives, career guidance, leadership development, and opportunities that might not have been possible without a mentor.

- The primary benefits of being a mentor include: seeing other people grow by passing on the knowledge gained from being mentored, learning from someone at an earlier career stage by being open to what they have to say, and continuing to develop their own coaching and leadership skills.

- Race plays a role in mentoring relationships in that for those who had a mentor of a different race, it gave them new perspectives about the organization that they did not have. For those with same race mentors, having someone 'like them' was beneficial because the mentors had been there and the protégés could learn from them how they overcame or handled certain situations.

In the literature, it is written that black women find it difficult to find mentors. The women in this study did not have problems finding a mentor, and some found one when they were not even looking. Mentoring has become more popular in the past few years, and may be more commonplace. So, future research could look more in-depth to see if black women really have a hard time finding someone to mentor them.

Since the sample size of this study is small, generalizations about all black women cannot be made. Because the Minneapolis/St. Paul area is predominantly white, it would be interesting in future research to focus on an area in the country where black women leaders are more prominent and thus get a bigger sample size.

Whether a black woman is at the top of her game, or just starting out, it is beneficial to have not one, but several mentors, to help navigate the corporate
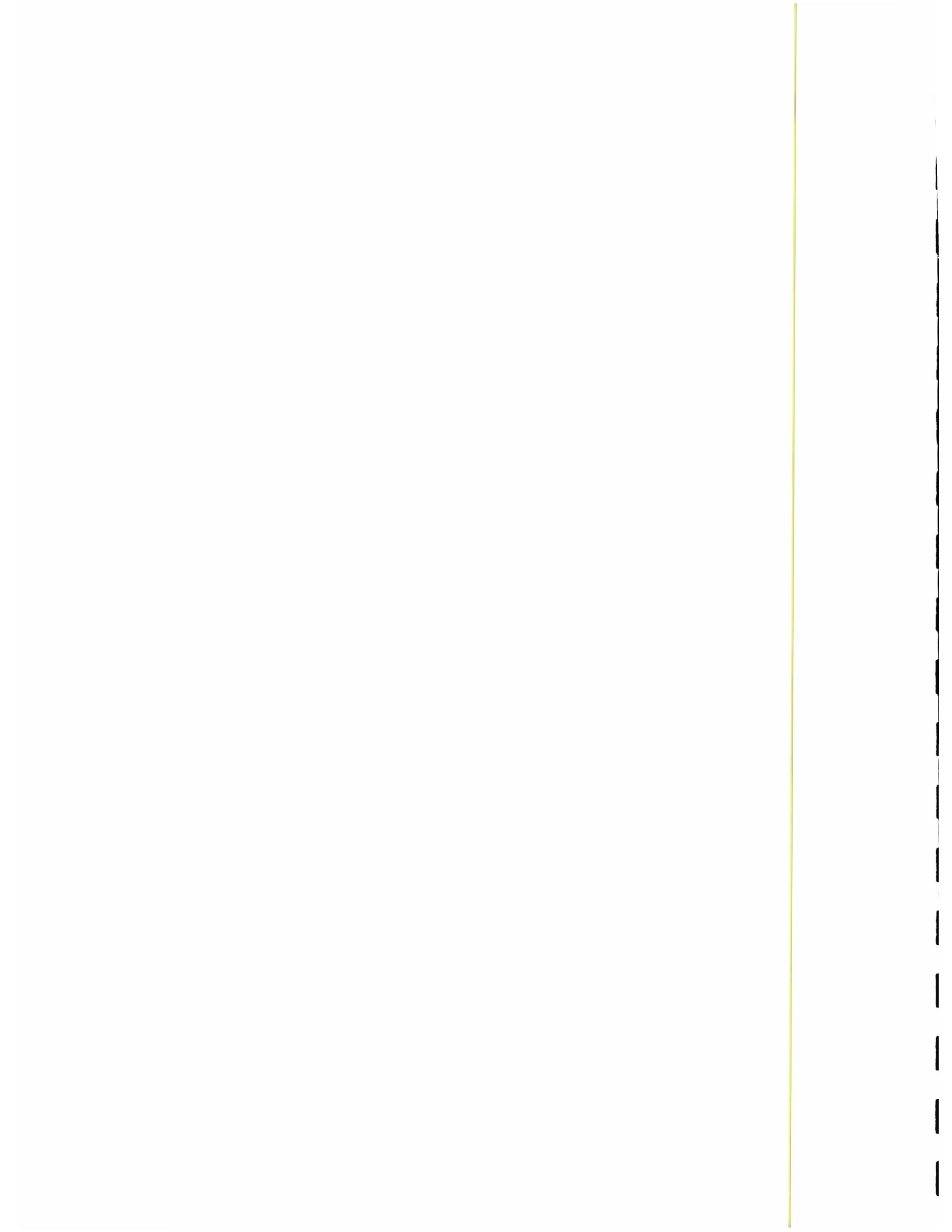
world. Mentors can be any gender, and any ethnicity, but should be someone trustworthy that can provide black women with the guidance needed to succeed. Collins (1983) stressed that women need to be mentored if they want to succeed. With the right mentor, they will have a better chance of understanding the game that men invented and know how to play. Wickman and Sjodin (1997) sum it up nicely by saying "[T]he power of people helping people in a one-on-one, personal mentoring program can be the key to achieving more in life than you ever dreamed possible" (p. xvi).

References

American heritage college dictionary (4ᵗʰ ed.). (2002). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Bell, E. L. (1990). The bicultural life experiences of career oriented black

women. *Journal of Organizational* Behavior, 11(6), 459 - 477.

Bell, E. L., Denton, T. C., & Nokomo, S. (1993). Women of color in management:

Toward an inclusive analysis. In E. A. Fagenson (Ed.), *Women in*

management: Trends, issues, and challenges in managerial diversity.

Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Catalyst, Inc. (1998). *Advancing women in business: The Catalyst guide.* San

Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Collins, N. W. (1983). *Professional women and their mentors: A practical guide to*

mentoring for the woman who wants to get ahead. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:

Prentice-Hall.

Doyle, M. K. (2000). *Mentoring heroes: 52 fabulous women's paths to success*

and the mentors who empowered them. Batavia, IL: 3E Press.

Gibson, J. W., Tesone, D. V., & Buchalski, R. M. (2000). The leader as mentor.

Journal of Leadership Studies, 7(3), 56.

Juncos, A. (2002). Catalyst's latest census finds progress for women at the top is

steady but slow. *Perspective.* Retrieved April 28, 2003, from

http://www.catalystwomen.org.

Kalbfleisch, P. J., & Davies, A. B. (1991). Minorities and mentoring: Managing the

multicultural institution. *Communication Education*, 40(3), 266 - 271.

Murray, M. (2001). *Beyond the myths and magic of mentoring: How to facilitate an effective mentoring process.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Moore, L. L. (Ed.) (1986). *Not as far as you think: The realities of working women.* Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books.

Phillips-Jones, L. (1982). *Mentors and protégés.* New York: Arbor House.

Simonetti, J. L., Ariss, S., & Martinez, J. (1999). Through the top with mentoring. *Business Horizons*, 42(16), 56 - 62.

Sosik, J. J., & Lee, D. L. (2002). Mentoring in organizations: A social judgment perspective for developing tomorrows leaders. *Journal of Leadership Studies,* 8(4), 17 - 33.

Steele, C. O. (1995). African-American women network their way to the top. *Executive Female,* 18(3), 38 - 41.

Thomas, D. A., & Gabarro, J. J. (1999). *Breaking through: The making of minority executives in corporate America.* Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press.

Wickman, F., & Sjodin, T. (1997). *Mentoring: The most obvious yet overlooked key to achieving more in life than you dreamed possible.* Chicago: Irwin Professional Publishers.

Zey, M. G. (1991). *The mentor connection: Strategic alliances in corporate life.* New Brunswick, VA: Transaction Publications.

Appendix A: IRB Approval

April 22, 2003

To: Sara Masters

From: Norma C. Noonan, Chair

I am pleased to inform you that the IRB has approved your application for the

project: **Black Women Leaders: The Value of Being in a Mentoring**

Relationship

      _____as submitted

      __X___as revised with additional form(s)/changes

      _____with the following conditions:

Your IRB approval number which should be noted in your written project and in

any major documents alluding to the research project is as follows:

2003-25-2

I wish you success with your project. If you have any questions, you may contact

me at noonan@augsburg.edu

Cc: Dr. Velma Lashbrook

Appendix B: E-mail to Potential Participants

I received your name from {describe where or from whom I got their name}. I am completing the Master of Arts in Leadership program at Augsburg College. For my final project I am studying black woman leaders who have been in mentoring relationships. We know that black woman are underrepresented in leadership positions in this country, so it is important to find out how some black woman succeed. I have found very little research done specifically on black women who have been mentored and how these relationships have contributed to their career success. The intent of this research is to find out the significance these mentoring relationships have on a black woman's advancement. I am also interested in the difficulties in finding a mentor and how they can be overcome, as well as discovering what specifically about the mentoring process was the most helpful.

I will call you in a couple of days to go over the specifics of this research project, answer any questions you have, and ask you a few preliminary questions to make sure your experiences match the criteria I am looking for.

Sincerely,

Sara Masters

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

**Black Women Leaders: The Value of being in a Mentoring Relationship.
Consent Form**

You are invited to be in a research study of black women leaders and mentoring. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a black woman leader who has or is being mentored. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my Master of Arts in Leadership requirement at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to find out more about black women being mentored and how that contributed to their career success. The intent of this research will be to find out how significant a mentoring relationship is for a black woman's rise to the top in various organizations. I also want to find out if there are difficulties in finding a mentor and what specifically about the mentoring process is the most effective.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things. Set aside at least an hour for a face-to-face interview with the researcher. This can be at a time and place of your choice. Also, be available for any follow-up questions if needed.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has a risk: there will be questions asked regarding race and if race factors into the difficulties of finding a mentor and becoming a leader. If you are uncomfortable talking about race, you do not have to answer those questions. Also, because there are so few black woman leaders in the Twin Cities area, there is a risk that your identity could be discovered by your answers.

There is no direct benefit of participation. An indirect benefit will be a contribution to knowledge in the field of leadership; more specifically with black women leaders and how mentoring factors into their success.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you or your company. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will

have access to the records with the academic advisor having limited access. A tape recorder will be utilized to capture all answers appropriately and will be discarded upon completion of the final project which will be on or before August 1, 2003.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the College or with the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Sara Masters. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at (612) 330-1778 or my advisor Velma Lashbrook at (952) 937-8100.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature

_____

Date_____

Signature of investigator

_____

Date_____

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the report or resulting research paper.

Signature _____Date _____

I consent to be audio taped.

Signature _____Date _____

Appendix D: Interview Questions

For this interview, I would like you to think about the most significant mentoring relationship – one in which you were the mentoree – that you have experienced.

1. How did you get involved in this mentoring relationship? (Was it an informal or formal pairing? Did you seek them out or did they find you?)

2. At what period of your career did you enter into this relationship? What motivated you to find a mentor at that time?

3. Did you find it difficult to find a mentor? Why or why not?

4. When you started thinking about getting a mentor, how did you hope to benefit from the relationship?

5. What criteria did you use in selecting a mentor?

6. Tell me about your mentor (e.g., title, gender, race, where are they located). How has race played a role in your mentoring relationship?

7. When you met/meet with your mentor, what kinds of things did/do you talk about? Can you give some examples of the kind of support you received from your mentor? (What kinds of knowledge? Career guidance? Were any doors opened for you?)

8. How did/do you benefit from being mentored?

9. What was the best advice you received from your mentor?

10. Do you think you could have gotten where you are today without a mentor? Why or why not?

11. Are you (would you) mentoring another black woman? Why or why not? How have you (or would you) benefit?

12. Do you have any other mentors or support relationships that have facilitated your career? How have they helped you?

13. What advice would you give young black women about finding and developing a mentoring relationship?