

Reverse Mentoring Programme

Increasing the Visibility of Female Employees in Media Companies

Background and Objective

The media industry is quite woman friendly when compared to other industries such as IT or financial services, however the numbers are more dismal when we look at senior women executives in media.

Women in senior positions in media companies (North America)

Top executives in media, telco and e-companies: 13%

Board level: 9%

“Most powerful position”: 3%

(Source: University of Pennsylvania)

Students studying journalism: 55%

Working journalists: 38%

Editor positions: 28%

Managing editors or editors-in-chief: 5%

(Source: International Federation of Journalists)

In the film industry:

Producers: 16%

Creative talent behind highest grossing Hollywood movies: 17%

(Source: San Diego State University)

While there is little overt discrimination against women that impedes them from climbing the corporate ladder, most corporations still reward behaviour and attitudes towards competition, decision-making and leadership that responds to traditional corporate rules that are typically set by men.

The objective of this programme is to get first-hand experience of the issues that face your own organisation that could be participating in hindering your female employees from reaching the top. Increasing women participation at the top echelons of a media company has a magnified effect, namely that decisions made by a more diverse senior management would have an effect on the different ways women are portrayed in advertising and entertainment (movies, music, games) as well as influence choice of topics covered by news media.

The Reverse Mentoring Programme

Through a rigorous selection process, a high-performing female employee is matched with the CEO (to avoid confusion, we will assume the CEO is male) to help him gain knowledge and insights that will enable him to incorporate diversity into his daily business.

The goals of the Reverse Mentoring Programme are to:

- Enhance the understanding of gender issues within the business units;
- Encourage frank discussion of “tough” gender-related issues;
- Enhance leadership, conflict management, and coaching skills of both ‘mentees’ and mentors; and
- Develop strategies to create a more inclusive work environment.

A very positive by-product of the process (but not a core goal in itself) is the development and exposure that mentors will gain from their involvement. The CEO learns what is going on in different parts of the company, on a “real” level and not the polished, glossy version reserved for the CEO

Choosing the Mentor

To help identify prospective mentors, HR and senior management are asked to nominate high-performing women first-level to middle-managers. Nominees will be invited to apply, short-listed for interviews, and then assessed against established criteria in February. In the first half of March, mentors will then go through a mentoring workshop (organised by the Forum) in which roles, responsibilities and expectations will be discussed. The mentoring partners will then meet over an initial period of 1 year, with a group check-in after 4 months.

Meetings and Logistics

We recommend the following in order to ensure a smooth mentoring experience:

- Meet once every 4 weeks, about 1.5-2 hours
- Mentor sets the agenda, preferably in advance
- Respect the mentor’s agenda
- Always agree on the next meeting before the end of your present one
- Meet in a relaxed and social environment (over a meal or drink), and never in the CEO’s office
- Always fill out an evaluation form at the end of the session

Joint Responsibilities

- Invest time in getting to know one another and building trust
- Contract with one another the desired goals, outcomes and expectations (and be realistic and explicit)
- Agree how you are going to track progress
- Plan and commit to meetings, and stick to the commitment
- Be explicit about maintaining and respecting confidentiality
- Give and receive constructive feedback and challenge
- Be prepared to share and respect personal experiences
- Adopt a true “learning” mindset
- Leave organisational hierarchy outside the door; you’re there as equal learning partners.

Mentor Responsibilities

- Focus on the needs and opportunities of the mentee
- Draw on, and be prepared to share, your personal experiences, insights and perspectives
- Be constructive and assertive. Strike the right balance between advocacy and enquiry; listen, explore, ask questions as well as provide input
- Be comfortable with disagreement and “allow for the possibility of a different truth”
- Come to meetings prepared with ideas and suggestions about both content and process. Try to make optimum use of what is a very scarce resource; time together.

Mentee Responsibilities

- Be an active and appreciative learner, prepared to try to “see what you don’t yet see”
- Prepare for the meetings, and do your part to make them as fruitful as possible
- Take responsibility for helping your mentor to fulfil his/her role
- Respect your mentor’s time
- Be prepared to experiment and take risks
- Be open, honest and explicit about what you’re thinking/feeling

What to Discuss- Examples

- Personal experiences: e.g., what happened to me in the meeting
- Observed behaviour: e.g., how I saw my colleague being sidelined in a team discussion
- Articles, literature: e.g., an article I read in Fast Company mentioned that women do not negotiate their salaries in the same way
- Theoretical situations: e.g., how should I respond if I (being the only woman in the meeting) was asked nicely, and not maliciously, to get the coffee for everyone else by my boss

The Summer Governors meeting

We invite you to bring your mentor to the Media & Entertainment Governors meeting which will be held in Montreux, Switzerland on July 8th and 9th. This is an opportunity for you and her to share your experiences and insights with peers amidst a very enjoyable setting and jazz festival.

Your Next 7 Steps

Step	Activity	Suggested Timeline
1	Believe in the Reverse Mentoring Programme	By the time you are back in your office
2	Commit to the programme, introduce it in your company and select a nomination committee	February 15th
3	Select candidate and send the Forum her name	February 29th
4	Briefing for women mentors organised by Forum	Mid March
5	Set the 1 st mentoring meeting	March 31st
6	Meet at least 3 times	April, May, June
7	Report back with your mentor at Summer Governors Meeting	July 8-9th