

10. Mentoring:



: women,
equity,
architecture.

Mentoring is a critical tool for retaining women in architecture, developing their careers and assisting women returning to work after career breaks. Mentoring relationships can be useful and inspirational. They deliver valuable learning experiences and diverse support and advice to the mentee. They also provide value for the mentor who shares experience and skills and gains insight into the concerns and experiences of younger architects.

This guide outlines the benefits of mentoring programs and relationships, and includes strategies for building their effectiveness.



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What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a professional relationship in which an experienced person provides general career guidance and advice, offers insights into the workplace and profession, and gives access to professional networks. Mentors help less experienced architects and graduates to grow and develop personally and professionally, and assist them to maximise their full potential.

Types of mentoring There are several different types of mentoring: informal, formal and institutional. Many mentoring relationships develop informally and become life-long connections. Career issues and challenges are dealt with as they arise, without a regular fixed time commitment. Others are more formal endeavours, established by individual companies to facilitate knowledge sharing, and to develop and retain talented employees.

There are also external mentoring programs, often provided by professional organisations and industry groups as a membership benefit. These are particularly useful for women (who often find it difficult to find female role models in upper levels of particular practices) and those in regional locations (who may need to establish an online mentoring relationship due to the tyranny of distance). There are a number of existing mentoring programs available within Australian architecture.

Outcomes US research, which compared a sample of employees over a five-year period, suggests compelling advantages for those involved in mentoring programs. Both mentors and mentees were 20% more likely to receive a pay increase than those who weren't involved. Mentees were

promoted five times more often than those without a mentor, and mentors were promoted six times more often than those who didn't formally mentor junior staff. Retention rates for mentors and mentees were much higher than for employees who weren't involved in mentoring programs.

The consultation accompanying these guides provided extensive feedback applauding the professional benefits of mentoring programs in architecture and the significant role that this can play in supporting and retaining women in architecture.

Career champions and sponsors There is increasing interest in the idea of 'career champions' and 'sponsors', which some argue can be even more effective in supporting and boosting career progression. Sponsors are advocates rather than advisers. They alert employees to opportunities for 'hot' jobs, pay raises or promotions and act as formal referees. They open doors and make introductions to high-level contacts. They help employees to become more visible to the decision makers in a company, and connect them directly to career opportunities.



What are the opportunities?

The Parlour survey and other recent data on women in architecture has identified the five to seven years following graduation as a key period when large numbers of women leave the architectural profession.

Mentoring programs can be especially effective in supporting and retaining female staff and younger workers in this early career phase, and over the course of an architectural career.

Mentors can assist with career planning and strategy, help employees to navigate through career crunch points, and provide general moral support. Busy senior professionals can provide excellent advice and guidance, but retired architects can also be a useful resource.

Early career Mentoring at the beginning of a career can help women navigate the challenges of the architectural workplace, and encourage them to stay in the profession.

Career break Mentoring is also valuable for professionals re-entering the workforce after a career break, for those working in non-traditional ways and those approaching transition points in their careers – for example, taking on extra responsibility as a project architect or becoming an associate.

Setting up practice Mentoring can also be valuable for those setting up their own practice, or experiencing growing pains in a developing practice.

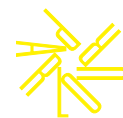
Practices

In competitive business environments, professional development can be lost in the mad rush to secure contracts and meet deadlines. There are not always enough hours in the day for staff to share thoughtful, honest advice about work and career. And yet building a supportive company culture of ongoing professional growth and development is invaluable to practice, not only for staff retention and morale, but also for business outcomes. Mentoring programs that are run well can be of enormous benefit to all.

Benefits to practices

- Building a strong culture of transparency and knowledge development.
- Enhancing the leadership and coaching skills of senior staff.
- Improving staff performance and motivation.
- Enriching all participants with learning experiences and shared knowledge – both mentors and mentees.
- Helping to fill knowledge gaps.
- Encouraging a cohesive culture of ‘all in this together’ rather than ‘us vs them’.
- Empowering existing and future leaders within the company.

The value of external mentoring programs should not be underestimated either. They can draw valuable knowledge and experience from outside an individual practice, build on existing business contacts and networks, and develop new ones.



Mentors and Mentees

It's clear that a mentee stands to gain invaluable advice and support from a good mentoring relationship, but benefits can flow the mentor's way too. The strongest mentoring relationships serve as a genuine two-way exchange of insights, skills and experience.

Benefits to mentors

- Gaining satisfaction from sharing their hard-won knowledge, ensuring that talent is rewarded and watching someone flourish in their career. Also, it's a very concrete way to be a gender equity champion.
- Feeling empowered to take on more responsibility or leadership roles within the practice and/or the profession.
- Developing leadership skills.
- Gaining respect and recognition within a practice, or within the profession as a whole.
- Viewing office dynamics and work situations through fresh eyes (with new and different insights). Improving their communication/management skills with their own staff or department.
- Learning about how others in the company perceive them (if their mentee works in the same company).
- Building important relationships with up-and-comers, who may prove useful professional contacts as they rise through the career ranks.
- Filling knowledge gaps they might have about new trends/technology/modes of communication.
- Mentors on a career break might find it useful to stay in touch with mentees who are continuing to practice.

Benefits to mentees

- Gaining assistance to clarify career goals and aspirations, and advice on how to achieve them.
- Gaining advice in relation to new professional challenges and roles.
- Gaining moral support and empathy for their professional situation.
- Increasing visibility to management and decision-makers in a practice.
- Developing networks and networking skills. Securing introductions to key people in the industry.
- When returning to work after a career break, gaining advice in navigating the workplace and understanding major changes or initiatives.

The profession

Mentoring programs play an important role in building capacity and expertise in the profession, which is vital to the ongoing health of the profession. Professional organisations can play a critical part in developing, sponsoring and supporting mentoring programs.



What can we do?

Practices, professional organisations and individuals can each contribute to promoting and supporting mentoring in architecture: the profession, through the establishment and promotion of mentoring programs; practices, by establishing their own mentoring programs or allowing time for external ones; and individual architects, who put their hand up to participate as mentors or mentees.

Practices

Consider setting up a mentoring program within your practice if you don't already have one.

This can be a highly beneficial cost-effective way of developing emerging talent and keeping experienced senior staff engaged and inspired. A successful mentoring program can help build a culture of personal and professional growth within the company. It's an exchange of ideas and experience, the chance for all to enrich their knowledge and skills base.

Mentoring programs may differ, depending on the size and needs of the practice. However, there are some key factors that will determine the success of your mentoring program.

Link mentoring to business strategy

Consider the business objectives and future plans for the practice when establishing your mentoring program.

Mentoring can facilitate the regular exchange of skills and experience, which can be of enormous benefit to the future development of a practice.

- **Identify future skill requirements in the practice and take these into account when establishing mentoring partnerships.**
- **Consider how mentoring can aid skill transfer. Are some senior staff members a little out of touch with current technology and communication? Can they be matched with graduates with a high level of technological skill? Does a junior employee need more experience dealing with clients and contractors? Can they be matched with a particularly skilled communicator?**

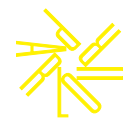
Determine the goals of the mentoring program

It is important to be clear about the reasons for establishing the mentoring program and what you expect the benefits to be for participants and the practice.

New staff You may decide to establish a program to assist new staff in navigating their way through a new workplace (much like an extended orientation), learning about the company's history, culture and prime objectives, values and priorities, and translating the unwritten rules.

Long-term employees A mentoring program for long-term employees can increase motivation, encourage ongoing learning and development, and gain awareness of any potential burn-out or discontent.

High-potential employees High-potential employees might be targeted for mentoring assistance, to ensure their potential within the practice is maximised and retained.



Senior staff Senior staff might be identified who would benefit from a regular cross-generational exchange.

All are valid and beneficial.

- Identify the key goals of the mentoring partnerships.
- Outline the roles and responsibilities of the mentors and mentees, and set down the ideal scenario for how the relationship will develop and grow.
- Ensure that the participants understand their commitment and are clear about the goals of the partnership.
- Put in place a realistic schedule in which to measure achievements and outcomes to keep everyone on track.

Devote time and resources

Mentoring programs need not be onerous, but they do require time and effort to work effectively. Depending on the formality of the mentoring relationship, the commitment can be anything from a regular monthly coffee catch-up to impromptu arrangements that respond to career issues as they arise.

Either way, availability and a two-way commitment to the mentoring relationship will be the key to its success.

- Practices that seek to realise the benefits of mentoring for company cohesion and skills transfer need to allow staff the time to build and nurture these relationships.
- Provide training or guidance for all mentors and mentees on their roles, responsibilities and appropriate behaviour within the relationship.
- If your practice is not large enough to run an inhouse mentoring program, consider offering staff the time to participate in mentoring programs run by industry organisations – as both mentors and mentees. This can also lead to benefits to your practice.

Match-make wisely

When pairing up your mentors and mentees, think carefully about temperament and personality as well as skills and experience.

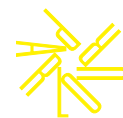
Sometimes it's beneficial to create a committee with participants of differing genders, ages and experience levels to help to make the decisions. Some companies allow their employees a certain amount of choice over their mentoring partner, giving them a selection to choose from.

- When choosing your mentors, think about the type of skills, workplace behaviours and strengths you would like to expand and promote within your company.
- Beware of choosing senior staff who may feel threatened by young bright architects on their way up. Encouragement and support is key to a successful relationship.
- A poor match can be more damaging than helpful. Establish a procedure for either side to make a graceful exit from the relationship if it's not working out.

Secure support from senior staff

A new mentoring program is unlikely to work if everyone is not on board. Cynicism from the top will quickly flow down the company hierarchy.

- Senior staff should be as involved in and committed to the program as possible – either as a mentor themselves or informally advocating for the program and encouraging employees to participate.
- Instruct those in charge of HR matters to make formal recognition of the participation of mentors and mentees in performance reviews.



Establish return-to-work mentoring

'Return to work' mentors and support schemes are vital in retaining women in the architecture profession, particularly after maternity leave or a break to care for children.

Mentors can help to build confidence and offer insights into recent changes in the workforce. They can help returnees to see the 'lay of the land', and help them to identify any skills gaps they need to fill. They can give moral support at a career crossroads, where many unnecessarily fall by the wayside.

- Don't underestimate the transformative effects of an empathetic ear and sage advice for those returning to work.
- Harness the wisdom of working parents who are further along the road in the work/life juggle – they will have invaluable advice about time management and prioritisation, about what to sweat about and what to let go, about how to make things work for the benefit of all.

Mentors & mentees

Adding a non-competitive human dimension to your working life is not a bad commitment to make. In a way it's a gift to yourself – a chance to pause for breath and review where you are and where you're going.

Whether you're a mentor building on your own management skills, or a mentee seeking an experienced advisor, it's often a win-win relationship. However, to ensure the success of your mentoring partnership, there are a few things that you should keep in mind.

Be clear

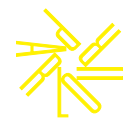
A mentoring relationship should begin with clear communication between mentor and mentee about the goals, expectations and anticipated level of engagement of both people.

- Identify the scope and boundaries of the mentoring relationship upfront.
- Establish ground rules, ensuring everyone has realistic expectations.
- Consider and discuss confidentiality and privacy issues.
- Be aware of potential conflicts of interest, and discuss them ahead of time.
- Set goals and discuss a timeframe to measure these.

Make time

The single factor most likely to lead to the breakdown in a mentoring partnership is the failure to make time to meet. Knowing this in advance can make a big difference.

- Schedule meetings or email connections or Skype catch-ups in advance.



Acknowledge reciprocal mentoring

The best mentoring arrangements are a two-way street, with each participant learning and growing from the experience.

Reverse or reciprocal mentoring acknowledges that there are benefits for the mentor as well – whether it's a fresh perspective on work situations or challenges, valuable knowledge and insights of current technology and modes of communication, or access to new networks of emerging talent.

Both mentor and mentee can be an invaluable sounding board for each other, which will ensure a more satisfying, rewarding relationship.

- The mentor and mentee should acknowledge the two-sided aspect of the mentoring relationship upfront, so they embark on the arrangement with that intent (rather than with a lopsided power dynamic).
- The mentor and mentee should agree to share experiences and insights, and to be open to learning from each other. The mentor will obviously have much to offer in the way of sage advice, but a recent graduate may be able to offer other kinds of insight.
- The mentor and mentee should recognise that they may have different styles of communication, and to pledge to be open and transparent with one another.

Jump the fence

Don't be afraid to go outside your organisation, or even outside architecture, to find the right mentor/mentee. Experiences and ideas for strategising a way through office politics and personalities are surprisingly universal.

Similarly, if you're striking out on your own, a mentor with experience in starting their own small engineering business may be a far more valuable resource than a highly experienced architect who has only worked within larger firms.

- Be open-minded about where you might find a mentor/mentee. Explore personal networks and existing programs. See **Further resources at the end of this guide.**
- Don't be disheartened if a potential mentor turns you down. Move on and keep looking.

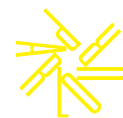
Consider diversity

Mentoring relationships are often set up or evolve with similarities in both professional and personal life in mind. However, a creative mismatch can prove surprisingly beneficial to both parties.

- Matching across age, cultural background and gender can encourage a cross-generational exchange of experience and ideas. It can help to fill knowledge gaps on both sides.
- Having access to both male and female mentors can help women gain the tools and networks they need for success.
- For male mentees, a variety of mentors can build an awareness of office or industry inequities. Seeing workplace conditions and office pressures and dynamics from a totally different perspective can stimulate behavioural change on both sides.

Build on professional networks

The mentor/mentee relationship is dynamic, and changes over time. What may begin as a fairly straightforward knowledge and skills transfer can turn into a much more strategic relationship, where mentees are introduced to influential people (such as potential clients or trusted builders and engineers), both socially and professionally.



- Mentors should ensure that introductions are made in neutral surrounds – a casual coffee after a work-related meeting can be a low-key way to make an introduction.
- Mentors can arrange for mentees to participate in high-visibility activities within the practice, or high-profile industry events.

Be prepared to move on

Architects often have a range of people to whom they turn for professional advice. Some will be in the industry; some won't. Some will cross genders and cultures; others won't. Each mentor can contribute something towards the overall career picture. Eventually, some mentoring relationships simply run their course. The mentee may be promoted alongside the mentor (career development is the goal, after all), and the relationship changes to one of colleague or friend. The mentee may move on to another city or company, or they may no longer have the need for regular counselling and advice.

- Don't be afraid to say goodbye. If the need is no longer there, the mentoring relationship has succeeded!

The profession

Many practices simply don't have the staff or resources required to implement formal mentoring programs. Professional organisations often fill this gap. Many of the state chapters of the Australian Institute of Architects establish, run and support mentoring programs that work across the profession, rather than within individual practices. The Institute has access to a wide variety of talented people at differing skill and experience levels, including retirees who often have vast professional networks, practical experience and wisdom to impart.

It can be especially challenging to access mentoring from regional and remote offices. Without the sizeable informal networks that exist in larger areas, the ability to find a willing and suitable mentor can be hard, and the ability to stay in regular contact even harder. For regional architects, online mentoring programs could provide a means to stay connected and be incredibly useful for both parties.



Credits

The Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice are an outcome of the research project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership' (2011–2014), led by Naomi Stead of the University of Queensland.

The development of the guides was led by Justine Clark and Naomi Stead, working with Susie Ashworth and Neph Wake. The guides were designed by Catherine Griffiths. Full credits can be found in the introduction to the guides. The guides are published with the support of the Melbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne.

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Further resources

Wing to Wing: A Mentoring Guide

Lisa Quast, Career Woman, Inc

http://www.wing2wingproject.org/docs/CWI-Mentoring-Guide_ver-10-Mar-2012.pdf

Creating Successful Mentoring Programs: A Catalyst Guide

Catalyst

<http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/creating-successful-mentoring-programs-catalyst-guide>

A range of mentoring programs are currently available in architecture and the built environment. Of course these will change over time – so also do your own research into what is currently available.

Australian Institute of Architects State Chapter Mentoring Programs

The Victorian Chapter runs the Constructive Mentoring program, which is specifically aimed at women. Other states also run mentoring programs from time to time. Contact your local chapter to find out what it offers.

The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) Mentoring Program

This a free service open to all current NAWIC members, which matches up mentors and mentees by age, experience and goals. Its purpose is to extend women's networks and give them valuable advice on industry and work-related issues.

<http://www.nawic.com.au>

Women's Planning Network (WPN) Mentor Program

Organised in collaboration with the Planning Institute of Australia, the WPN program pairs experienced planning 'mentors' with young professionals. Exchanges between mentors and their mentees can cover a broad range of topics, from workplace and leadership issues to discussion of current planning issues.

<http://www.wpn.org.au/mentor/index.htm>

Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA) e-Mentoring

Funded by the Australian government through the National Resources Sector Workforce Strategy, the AWRA e-Mentoring program is free for women in the resource, allied and construction industries to participate as mentees, and men and women in these industries to participate as mentors. Offered as an alternative to traditional face-to-face mentoring, it's aimed at professionals who must contend with remote locations, complex rosters or a shortage of female colleagues.

<http://www.amma.org.au/awra/awra-e-mentoring>

Further reading

'Constructive Mentoring and Positive Reinforcement'

Jeanne Lee, Parlour, 2012

<http://www.archiparlour.org/constructive-mentoring-positive-reinforcement/>

'Ten Tips for Being a Successful Mentor'

Sophie McCarthy, Women's Agenda

<http://www.womensagenda.com.au/career-agenda/mentors/ten-tips-for-being-a-successful-mentor/201302121608>

'Reverse Mentoring: What it is and Why it is Beneficial'

Lisa Quast, Forbes, 2011

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2011/01/03/reverse-mentoring-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-beneficial/>

'Reverse Mentoring Cracks Workplace'

Leslie Kwok, The Wall Street Journal

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970203764804577060051461094004>

'Why Mentoring Matters in a Hypercompetitive World'

Thomas J. DeLong, John J. Gabarro and Robert J. Lees, Harvard Business Review

<http://hbr.org/2008/01/why-mentoring-matters-in-a-hypercompetitive-world/ar/1>

'A Good Fit Crucial to Mentoring'

Beth N. Carvin, Talent Management magazine

<http://talentmgt.com/articles/view/a-good-fit-crucial-to-mentoring>

'Why You Need A Sponsor – Not A Mentor – To Fast-Track Your Career'

Jenna Goudreau, Business Insider Australia

<http://www.businessinsider.com.au/you-need-a-sponsor-to-fast-track-your-career-2013-9>

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