

## 07

THE WAY FORWARD GUIDE TO  
DEVELOPING AND UTILISING YOUR FEMALE TALENT

Developing the skills and capabilities of women within the workplace enables organisations to reap the benefits and retain sought-after, talented women. Research demonstrates that one of the reasons that women leave their jobs is that they have difficulty progressing and lack a visible career development path. This guide will assist human resources generalists and learning and development specialists to realise the opportunities to enable female employees to realise their full value and contribution to the organisation.

There are a number of assumptions about women that may affect their career development:

Firstly, it is sometimes assumed that women are more likely than men to leave their employer, and in particular that they are going to take leave to have and raise children. It seems easy to foresee that they will never again be fully productive or return to the workplace, full-time or at all.

Also, the behaviours and traits seen by senior leaders as important leadership attributes ('taking charge') are different to the attributes stereotypically attributed to women ('taking care')<sup>1</sup>.

If applied to a woman in an organisation, these assumptions could result in less investment in that woman's development and advancement in the organisation. This is a clear example of gender bias, and may result in inadequate training, skill-building, development and promotion for the woman, so that the company fails to ever truly reap the benefits of a talented and motivated worker.

Ironically, lack of career development and progression are often cited as a reason that women disconnect from their employer and leave<sup>2</sup>.

Research has also demonstrated that on the whole, women may not perceive and articulate their value and promote themselves for progression as well as men do<sup>3</sup>.

Initiatives that encourage women to further develop and promote themselves professionally are important if an organisation is to retain talented women and derive the benefits of their full inclusion in the business.<sup>4</sup>

"The individual development of women is at the heart of an effective gender-diversity ecosystem. These programs primarily focus on helping women overcome the barriers they face on their way to the top. For example, as highlighted in our survey, 38 per cent of female respondents consider as the third main barrier 'a tendency of many women not to promote themselves'. Companies that are leaders in gender diversity have implemented very effective training, coaching and mentoring programs to help women become aware of their potential and manage their careers in a predominately masculine environment. Setting up women's networks also increases women's awareness of this important lever for career progression, while simultaneously raising the profile of women leaders in an organisation. It is also an essential step to help young women identify with role models. Such initiatives often deliver outstanding results in terms of retaining and expanding the pool of female talent in companies, provided that the CEO is committed." (McKinsey&Company *Women Matter 2010*)<sup>5</sup>

Both formal and informal opportunities exist for women to develop the skills necessary to add value to the organisation and be included in the business' future. It is important that women at *all* levels and in all types of occupations have the opportunity to engage in career development, not just those who are in professional or managerial positions.

### Formal opportunities

Formal development opportunities have structure and clearly defined objectives, tasks or activities, and outcomes. They include courses, workshops and assignments, and can be internally or externally provided.

Training can be specifically developed and provided to assist women along their career paths, including women with management potential and aspirations. Similarly, training in general professional skills such as networking, influencing, delegation and people

management can particularly assist women in male-dominated work environments.

Formal opportunities also include allowing employees to gain experience in another position or rotate responsibilities within their team to develop new skills and learn from working outside of their comfort zone.

This kind of support might be in the form of time-off for external study. Such support allows women to upskill for further career progression and also makes them feel valued and engaged in the organisation.

Offering intra-company transfers will help them to see their part in the 'bigger picture' and can also increase employees' engagement with the organisation.

As well as being an important attraction and retention strategy, strong visible career development can also build a critical mass of women in the talent pipeline. Providing structured experiences to give them the necessary skills, experience and credibility for senior positions prepares women for roles and puts them in the leadership pipeline.

development topics, speakers and opportunities (such as networking).

## IMPORTANT POINTS TO NOTE ABOUT TRAINING

- Employees who have flexible work arrangements should, wherever possible, receive access to the same opportunities as other employees. Consider inviting employees on leave (e.g. parental) to attend any limited-opportunity training (e.g. an overseas trainer or specific workgroup initiative).
- Communicate development opportunities regularly and where all staff will see them e.g. email alert to all staff on the organisation's intranet and/or newsletter. Encourage participation of women where their involvement can benefit the trainee and send a positive inclusive message to the organisation.
- During performance appraisals, discuss training and development opportunities with employees as part of their personal development plans.
- Consider offering training opportunities and support for women to move into areas in which they are underrepresented, including non-traditional roles.
- Investigate the use of webinars to deliver training opportunities to staff who work remotely or in regional locations. There is also the ability to record these sessions for playback.
- Developmental work assignments should stretch the employees' existing skills to be challenging and rewarding.

### Less formal opportunities

These are not as structured as formal opportunities and learning may be a secondary benefit of the opportunity. Hosting events such as a 'lunch and learn' is typically simple and cost-effective for organisations, and a great way to introduce employees to different professional

Other important opportunities tap into the wisdom and experience of senior employees. There are a variety of ways in which senior employees can contribute:

- Mentoring – talking *with* a talented woman
- Coaching – talking *to* a talented woman
- Sponsoring – talking *about* a talented woman

In all cases, the senior person and the junior female will both likely require some skills training and support resources to assist them in the relationship and process. An organisation can provide a young female employee with guidance and support, and a more senior employee – male or female – with an opportunity to develop communication and other interpersonal skills (and to gain a different view of the world).

Because of AWRA's unique experience in offering the

industry-wide AWRA e-Mentoring Program, **mentoring** is the topic of another Way Forward Guide (*Way Forward Guide 08 Mentoring your Talented Women*). This resource contains detailed information about mentoring and e-mentoring, including tools and templates for developing your own internal mentoring program.

## MENTORING

### *Talking with a talented woman*

**Mentoring** is more abstract, and usually targets longer-term career development. Mentors counsel people long term, and the relationship will be most effective if it is structured through a program (though informal relationships can be effective depending upon the skills of the mentor). Mentoring tends to focus on transferable "soft" skills such as business savvy, self-confidence, interpersonal skills and self-management.

## COACHING

### *Talking to a talented woman*

A **coach** works with individuals (or teams) to achieve objectives related to work performance in the short- to medium-term. A coach might be required to address a known issue, or might use tools such as active listening to identify opportunities for improvement and growth. They point out skills in need of development and guide the person or team in goal setting. Coaching helps employees gain better awareness of skills development needs and to accept accountability for improvement.

## SPONSORING

### *Talking about a talented woman*

**Sponsoring** is a form of marketing undertaken by a senior and influential person. Sponsors are well respected business professionals in positions of power who have networks of relationships they can call on to influence decisions in their protégé's favour. The sponsor acts as an advocate and opens doors for the protégé.

## Supporting networks

Creating networks, or establishing links to existing networks, can assist and support the professional development of women and address a perceived lack of opportunities for women in male dominated industries.

Support networks within organisations allow for both networking among employees and the communication about initiatives such as flexible work arrangements with senior management. Organisational leaders can understand and address the specific issues of women employees, and allowing women a collective voice in the organisation empowers them to create workable solutions.

It is also important that women have the opportunity to network with others in their industry and from other industries. This may be achieved by inviting female clients and customers to internal events.

Consider establishing support groups that allow both men and women to participate in discussions about, for example, the challenges and opportunities of flexible work practices and inclusive cultures. Women-only networks have many benefits, but it's also critical to involve men in the gender diversity conversation, especially when a male-dominated leadership group is responsible for workplace policy decisions.

Remember:

1. Provide time off for employees to attend support network meetings.
2. Schedule meetings at times and locations when most people can attend, strive for the participation of a broad group.
3. Provide access to support networks through online platforms to encourage participation of women in remote or regional locations.
4. Invite senior women to speak about their experiences to demonstrate the opportunities that are available to women in the organisation and wider industry.

## CASE STUDY: OZ MINERALS

In 2012, OZ Minerals in partnership with Beach Energy Limited implemented a career development program for high-performing women called 'Leading My Career'. Leading My Career focused on providing strategic training and development opportunities to assist women to articulate and achieve their career goals.

The program was developed following internal workforce profiling within OZ Minerals that identified a lower female representation in the superintendent and middle management levels. OZ Minerals recognised that in order for women to reach senior management positions, they must be supported during each stage of their career.

A series of focus group sessions were held in early 2011, which identified that women wanted training and development options to assist their career development, extend professional networks and have access to a mentor. Fourteen participants across OZ Minerals and Beach Energy from a range of specialities including commercial, engineering, metallurgy and geology were invited to attend the program after recommendation from either their managers or a senior executive nomination.

The key objectives for participants are:

- increase self-awareness of leadership, communication and behavioural styles
- formulate individual action plans to progress skill development
- detail a career plan by reflecting on their current role and articulating future career objectives
- engage with challenging and affirmative mentors and extend professional networks

Each participant was matched with a senior executive from the reciprocal organisation, based on experience and background, to form a mentoring partnership. Mentors of the program included OZ Minerals' Directors and Beach Energy's Chief Financial Officer and Company Secretary. The mentoring partnerships allowed participants to seek advice and guidance from experienced professionals as well as extend their professional networks. Over a six month period, participants were involved in a series of group workshops and structured networking sessions to develop crucial skills and reflect on career goals. Focus group sessions were held at the half-way and end point of the program to allow participants to discuss their progress and determine outcomes from the program.

'Leading My Career' has assisted OZ Minerals to work towards achieving its diversity goals of increasing female representation across all levels of the organisation by lifting the profile of women within both organisations and providing a platform to openly discuss their career goals with managers.

Key personal successes include:

- Reaffirming, establishing or expanding on personal career plans, goals and objectives
- Increased motivation and enthusiasm for current role and career direction
- Pro-active management of career, communicating a desire for increased responsibilities or change in role.
- Greater identification of potential opportunities and ability to identify and attain the required skill set necessary for career advancement
- Increased exposure and recognition within the workforce, particularly to senior management, by highlighting the positive contributions
- Increased personal and professional networks
- Wider knowledge base through sharing of group experiences across different disciplines

Several participants obtained more senior roles during or soon after the program. Leading My Career is continuing with a continuing with a new cohort of 24 participants from OZ Minerals, Beach Energy and new partner Thiess.

Across Australia there are a number of state-based industry groups such as Women in Mining, Women in Resources and Women in Construction (see links to other Resources below) that regularly host networking events and professional development

opportunities. These groups offer important connections for women employees, especially when they may not exist within the organisation. Sponsoring women to be members of these networking groups may assist.

---

#### TO ACCESS OTHER RESOURCES ON THIS TOPIC

- <http://www.amma.org.au/awra/develop-your-talent>
- The AusIMM Women in Mining Network (WIMNet) <http://www.ausimm.com.au/content/default.aspx?ID=236>
- Women in Mining Western Australia (WIMWA) <http://womeninmining.com/>
- Women in Resources Victoria (WIRV) <http://www.wirv.org.au/>
- Women in Mining and Resources Queensland (WIMARQ) <http://www.womeninminingqueensland.com/>

---

#### REFERENCES

1. Catalyst, *Women “Take Care”, Men “Take Charge”: Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed*, 2005, retrieved 10 August 2013, <[www.catalyst.org/system/files/Women\\_Take\\_Care\\_Men\\_Take\\_Charge\\_Stereotyping\\_of\\_U.S.\\_Business\\_Leaders\\_Exposed.pdf](http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Women_Take_Care_Men_Take_Charge_Stereotyping_of_U.S._Business_Leaders_Exposed.pdf)>.
2. It’s About Time, *When Talented Women Leave Your Company: Is it Push or Pull?*, 2004, retrieved 9 August 2013 <<http://www.wfd.com/PDFS/2004-w-1.pdf>>.
3. Catalyst, *The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?*, 2011, retrieved 4 June 2013, <[http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/The\\_Myth\\_of\\_the\\_Ideal\\_Worker\\_Does\\_Doing\\_All\\_the\\_Right\\_Things\\_Really\\_Get\\_Women\\_Ahead.pdf](http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/The_Myth_of_the_Ideal_Worker_Does_Doing_All_the_Right_Things_Really_Get_Women_Ahead.pdf)>.
4. Catalyst, *Women and Men in U.S. Corporate Leadership: Same Workplace, Different Realities?*, 2004, retrieved 10 August 2013, <[http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Women%20and\\_Men\\_in\\_U.S.\\_Corporate\\_Leadership\\_Same\\_Workplace\\_Different\\_Realities.pdf](http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Women%20and_Men_in_U.S._Corporate_Leadership_Same_Workplace_Different_Realities.pdf)>.
5. McKinsey & Company, *Woman at the top of corporations: Making it happen*, 2010, retrieved 8 August 2013, <[http://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/dotcom/client\\_service/Organization/PDFs/Women\\_matter\\_oct2010\\_english](http://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/dotcom/client_service/Organization/PDFs/Women_matter_oct2010_english)>.
6. D Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs A Mentor: Fostering talent in your organization*, 4th edn, CIPD, London cited on <<http://www.horizonsunlimited.com.au>>.

---

The Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA) is an industry-led initiative dedicated to helping employers attract, retain and reap the rewards of women in resources workplaces.

AWRA is driven by Australia’s resource industry peak body, the Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA), and supported by the Australian Government through the National Resource Sector Workforce Strategy.



**Australian Government**

**Department of Industry, Innovation,  
Climate Change, Science, Research  
and Tertiary Education**