



One Hand Helps the Other:

Why Women

Need to Make
Good Connections and
Use Them to Help
Other Women Up the
Career Ladder

By Mary Ann Saar

Women need mentors to move up the career ladder; everyone does. It is as simple as that. Along the way in my career, I have mentored and have been mentored. When you mentor someone, it is not just about what that person gets out of what you give to him or her, it is just as much about what you get back from the person you mentor. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It's impossible to teach without learning something yourself."

Why Mentoring Is Important

Mentors can help you believe that you can stretch beyond your comfort zone. When I was about 5 years old and living in Germany, I was relatively shy. There was a woman living in the apartments where we lived who took an interest in me and worked with me — even bribed me — to learn a poem and a song, and present these on stage. This was the beginning of a long and painful process for both of us. I can still remember how fright-

ened I was, and then, how good I felt after the performance. This woman forced me to stretch my wings, and with her help I was able to fly.

One of my mentors — a very enlightened man — was former Maryland Gov. William Donald Schaefer, currently comptroller of Maryland. He pushed me well out of my comfort zone when I worked for him. He made me stop thinking about the new work as a difficulty to overcome, but rather as a challenge to meet. He made those who worked for him aspire to innovative thinking coupled with action. For Schaefer, that equates to leadership. With mentors like that, you cannot go wrong.

Let us be honest, within the criminal justice system, it is still a man's world. Traditionally, most people in leadership positions are men. Many times, women have to be smarter, tougher and out-work and out-distance men in the workplace just to stay even. However, in my long career — which includes being a probation officer, a deputy state's attorney, a secretary of the Department of Juvenile Services and a state director for U.S. Sen.

Barbara A. Mikulski — I have been witness to many changes in the system that have begun to chip away at old stereotypes and allow for the forward movement of women. There is no question that the ranks of female leaders are expanding.

In the fields of criminal justice and law enforcement, women must still prove themselves. The day may come when this is no longer the case, but for now, we must be twice as good, twice as smart and work twice as hard. Keep in mind that you must be firm in your resolve, in your leadership style, and know that not everyone will like you. As the old saying goes, “If everyone likes you, you’re not doing your job.”

Differences Between Male And Female Managers

There are differences between male and female managers, and recognizing the worth of these differences is invaluable to leaders in the criminal justice field or any other. Women need to establish their own style of leadership and not copy those of their male counterparts. Therefore, it is vitally important for women to mentor other women, especially in this field in order to establish role models. Women need to overcome many prejudices that come from their work in a traditionally male-dominated field, and having female mentors helps one overcome many of these obstacles. It is important to note that there are core attributes of leadership that apply to both males and females: respect for self, respect for others and responsibility for all you do.

In my past, a female mentor who comes to mind is former Baltimore City Judge Mary Arabian. She always encouraged me to reach beyond what I thought my capabilities to be. When I became a deputy state’s attorney, she encouraged me by saying: “You can do anything at all in this world if you want to do it. If you fail, you fail. You will never be 100 percent successful in everything you do.” From that point on, I faced many challenges and rose to those challenges. Once I overcame challenges successfully, I began to realize that I could do anything I really wanted to do. It is not the easy tasks that make us stronger. When you have handled your share of obstacles and changed what might seem like sure failure into success, you begin to understand the power of having a mentor behind you.

Pass Along What You Have Learned as a Mentee

Once you have been mentored and understood the importance of it, you cannot help but wish to pass what you have learned along to others. I mentored a young woman I worked with in the Baltimore City government many years ago. She needed encouragement and support to step up and out of the career niche in which she

found herself. We became very friendly, and I brought her up as my deputy when I became the director of the mayor’s Criminal Justice Council in 1982. She succeeded me in that job when I moved on to become chief of operations for Schaefer. From there, she went on to build a successful career at the Maryland Department of Human Resources, where she is now the director of social services for Frederick County. The role of mentor became the role of friend as the years passed. It has been a very worthwhile and enriching relationship for both of us.

Women Have Power — Organize And Use it

In Baltimore in 1994, a small group of women formed “Network 2000.” It was painfully clear in the early 1990s that there were very few women on the boards of large corporations — the ones that paid their board members. Women were virtually never offered paid corporate board positions during this decade. I was a founding member of Network 2000, which became a high-end support system for women. It comprises high-powered public and private sector professional women who are not afraid to apply pressure in the right places to get what they want — more women in positions of influence on corporate boards. Some of the women I work with and network with on Network 2000, include former U.S. Congresswoman Helen D. Bentley, the CEO of the Girl Scouts of Central Maryland, the publisher of the *Daily Record*, senior vice presidents of banks, the CEO of a large hospital, Maryland’s state school superintendent, judges, attorneys and many business owners.



Secretary Mary Ann Saar meets with the members of her executive staff, most of whom are women.

There are many more women on corporate boards a decade later because of Network 2000. The lesson learned is that when you apply pressure in the right places, it works. To put it another way, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Women have power, and they should use it to help other women.

Networking Means Never Having To Read the Classified Ads Again

As mentoring is important to building your knowledge base and self-esteem, so is networking to building connections for your career. Through networking, you will find out about job opportunities that never appear in a newspaper. You will gain friends, support and ideas, and develop resources to help you with your job and your career.

My current position as secretary of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services is a direct result of having my name put forward by people I have known and worked with for many years. My contacts called and wrote to Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. to tell him of my qualifications for this job. I did not even know this was being done on my behalf. It is good to have friends in high places, and it starts with one single step. Stop and talk to everyone you meet. Take telephone numbers, build your contact list. Networking is very smart and very effective.

If there are professional organizations with memberships, apply. Become active in committee work. The Women Working in Corrections and Juvenile Justice held its conference in Baltimore last year. The Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services had a committee of women and men who volunteered to help put on the conference. This kind of committee work will raise your profile.

Attend as many professional conferences as you, or your organization, can afford for you to attend. Conferences are very uplifting, educational and provide many opportunities for networking. When you are networking at conferences, you enhance your career because you bring new ideas back to work. Collect business cards, shake hands and stay after sessions for chats with colleagues from around the country. When you return to your job, you will have new professional contacts that will answer your calls, and continue to help you as you move up the ladder in the criminal justice field. Create good relationships and spend the time to maintain them — it will pay off for you and those women who come after you.

Put Your Power to Work For Other Women

Now that I have a position that oversees one of the largest pools of employees in Maryland — 11,700 people in all — I have the opportunity to hire qualified women in positions of trust and power. Of the 16 wardens in Maryland, four are women. My deputy secretary of operations is Mary L. Livers, and my chief of staff, director of legislative services and executive director of communications are all women.

The value of mentoring and networking is obvious, whether you are just starting out or have reached the pinnacle of your career. It is important to start establishing relationships now, which will grow from saplings into trees as you branch out in your profession.

Putting your power to work means using the power you have. Do not just sit there waiting for someone to call. I made myself known to Schaefer and Arabian. I did not let any moss grow under my feet, and neither should anyone who wants to be mentored by top-level people in their field. Comedienne Kathy Griffith says, "For every person who climbs the ladder of success, there are a dozen waiting for the elevator." Do not stand around waiting for that elevator; start climbing now. Seek out those who share your vision in criminal justice, write to them, call them and make yourself known. You will never know who might have recommended you for the job that someone else got unless you get up the nerve to ask for the recommendation.

Next, concentrate on finding the right person to seek as a mentor. Finding the right person is one of the toughest aspects of the mentoring relationship. It is essential that you know what you need. I suggest that you make a list of what you think you need in order to succeed in your chosen field. Then, make a list of the skill sets and experience you already have. Look for a mentor who has what you lack. No matter what profession or career you chose, your advancement can be greatly enhanced by actively networking and seeking mentors. But if you choose to advance in the area of public safety and corrections, then good mentors and networking are critical.

Mary Ann Saar is secretary of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

There are differences between male and female managers, and recognizing the worth of these differences is invaluable to leaders in the criminal justice field or any other.
