

ACE WOMEN'S Network™ Michigan

Mentoring Mondays
September 28, 2020

Let me take a moment to refresh our memories about why we are reviewing the book “*How Women Rise*” by Sally Helgensen and Marshall Goldsmith. This book focuses on “breaking the 12 habits holding you back from your next raise, promotion, or job.” So, as you review these excerpts, begin to build your strategy for breaking these habits. Today, we examine habit #5.

Habit 5: Failing to Enlist Allies from Day One

“Allies are the heart and soul of a successful career.” Although this quote is well into the chapter under review today, I wanted to begin with it to stress its significance. In most articles or books on leadership, you will find a passage somewhere about the “old boys’ network” and how they move up as a result of their connections and/or mentorship. The authors tell us that “Women who assume new positions resolve to keep their heads down until they’ve mastered the details and are confident they can perform to a certain standard. They want to feel fully prepared before they start reaching out. . . .” By contrast, men in new positions often start with the question: ‘Who should I connect with to make this job a success?’ They view the path to success not as a matter of *what* or *how*, but *who*. They see connections as the most important part of their job and want to start building them on day one.

“Allies are peers, colleagues, higher-ups, sponsors, direct-reports, internal and external fans who support your efforts to get where you want to go.” I am reminded of a conversation with the Chancellor at WCCCD early in his tenure. We were sitting around the conference table having lunch and the cleaning lady came around doing her job. He asked her name and engaged her in our conversation. When she left, he indicated to the staff that it is always a good practice to know and respect the people who enter your space because someday, they may be the only person able to support you in a crisis. Building relationships at all levels has its rewards for everyone. Just think about how the cleaning lady felt to be in conversation with the person holding “positional power.”

Let’s take a look at the roles of allies, mentors and sponsors. “In the 1990s and early 2000s, women were exhorted to find mentors, experienced higher-ups who could offer guidance and advice. The idea became institutionalized in many organizations, with HR setting up mentoring

circles or even hiring professional mentors to work with groups of women. But in 2011, the research organization Catalyst published a study that found, while mentorship could be helpful, sponsorship was the key success factor in women's careers. . . . A mentor offers advice and serves as a sounding board. . . a sponsor, usually a senior leader in your organization, serves as your advocate, puts your name forward for assignments, introduces you to important colleagues and helps remove structural road-blocks that could keep you stuck.”

Because there are so few women at the top in organizations, sponsors may be difficult to find. “So, if you are struggling to find one, your best response might be to pour that energy into building a broad ally network instead. In its original report, Catalyst also noted that sponsorship is most effective when it's been earned. As the authors observed: “To attract sponsors, employees need to make their skills, strengths, and work known to colleagues as well as to senior leaders. They must build reputations as flexible, collegial professionals who are consistently committed to their own career development. How do you do this? By actively engaging allies. Preferably from the day you start a new job.”

There is much more on this topic and you will want to read about the individual success stories from women in leadership positions. To secure your copy of “*How Women Rise*” visit www.hatchettbooks.com.