



Introduction

vicsport, with the support of VicHealth, has conducted research into the lack of women currently sitting on boards within the sport and recreation industry. Interviews were conducted with nine women who currently, or had previously, held a board position. The purpose of the interviews was to gather views based on firsthand experience and observations regarding common barriers faced by women, pathways onto board positions and possible strategies to encourage more women to get involved in governance positions of sporting organisations. Board positions held ranged from sporting clubs, State Sporting Associations (SSAs), peak bodies and government agencies.

One of the key themes discussed was mentoring and networking.

Mentoring and Networking

Mentoring involves a relationship where a person with specific knowledge and experience provides guidance and support to a more inexperienced party. A mentoring relationship can take shape in many different forms including; formal mentoring models, group mentoring and networks, company mentoring programs and informal relationships.

vicsport Female Administrators Network

The **vicsport** Female Administrators Network aims to assist women working in sport to establish links with other administrators. Each session addresses an issue or topic of interest for female administrators in an interactive workshop environment with informal networking opportunities available at the conclusion of each session.

One interviewee noted that; “Some of my staff have become involved in the **vicsport** Female Administrators Network and said it has been fantastic. In their words it is room of women and girls like them that are looking for more experience. They feel that it is a supportive environment of other women working in sport in similar positions to them. They like the group setting and that it is facilitated by an experienced female leader.”

Mentoring is not generally a one way street and often both parties will benefit from the relationship. Networking is an important aspect of mentoring as mentors are often either drawn from your existing network or new mentors can form an integral part of increasing your network. It is vital that you form real relationships with people rather than just networking for the sake of networking.

The women who took part in the interviews viewed mentoring as a valuable strategy to support women in the sports industry. It was considered important to increase women’s self confidence, to assist in establishing networks and supporting career development. One director stated that **“it is crucial to have a mentor to guide you and learn from their experience”**.

A number of women suggested that it is important for women to have multiple mentors in a variety of



forms; male and female, formal and informal. There is currently a number of formal mentoring and networking programs available for women in the sport industry however all of the women who took part in the interviews suggested that informal mentoring relationships and simply “catching up for a coffee and advice” was just as valuable and important.

vicsport invited the women to give their thoughts on mentoring which including why they thought mentoring for women in the sports industry was important and how it can be implemented to achieve the best outcomes.

“There are three rules around leadership... find a mentor, find a mentor, find a mentor.”

The interviewees suggested that mentoring was important for women wanting to advance themselves in the sport industry for the following reasons:

- Talking to people from different areas can help you determine exactly what you want to do and where you want to end up.
- One female emphasised the importance of letting other people know what your ambitions are. If people are not aware of what your goals are they cannot help you reach them.
- Relationships formed through mentoring can give a person a leg up when applying for higher positions or may result in you being recommended for positions.
- Mentoring provides you with a network of people that will look out and support you in the professional world.
- Mentoring was seen by the women as a two way street. The mentor often gains as much as the mentee.

“[I] feel that formal mentoring can be quite threatening. Only a small number of women feel confident enough to have the ability to be a mentor.”

The interviewees also offered some limitations to the traditional formal mentoring relationships:

- ‘Mentor’ can be a daunting concept as it implies a formality and time commitment which some people are do not feel they can commit to.
- Formal situations can often be contrived and people are not able to be relaxed and open themselves up.
- Many women often feel that despite their success they do not make suitable mentors.



Several suggestions were offered during the interviews as to how women can best harness the potential that mentoring provides. The main ideas were:

- Male mentors are also required. One woman suggested that while men still hold the vast majority of power roles it is important that your name is brought up by these individuals who have influence on leadership positions.
- There were mixed opinions on the success of group mentoring and networking programs so it was suggested that a combination of approaches should be used.
- Don't be afraid to call someone and ask them for advice. Two of the women interviewed said that they would never say no if someone if they asked them to go and have a coffee and a chat.

“If anybody called me and said ‘hey can we have a coffee’, I’d never say no.”

Recommendations	Rationale
Utilise a variety of mentoring models until you find a combination which works for you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal and informal • Group and individual
Have both male and female mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They offer different perspectives from their experiences
Use your mentors to build your networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form meaningful relationships with new contacts who you feel you can benefit from