

# Women Entrepreneurs Need Mentors

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## Abstract

As of 2014 United States' women entrepreneurs own 9.1 million businesses creating the fastest growing business segment. This phenomenological study highlights how women entrepreneurs can learn to be more objective while managing their company through a leadership position. The main themes emerging from the study were the value of a mentorship experience and how a transformational leadership style may help women entrepreneurs grow their businesses and develop personally and professionally. Seventy-five percent of women leaders maintain that mentoring plays an integral part in their career. This study may contribute to positive social change by encouraging women entrepreneurs to establish on-going mentoring relationships.

*Key words:* Women entrepreneurs, mentoring, women mentees, mentoring outcomes, transformational leadership

## Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to present the benefits of mentoring through lived experiences of women entrepreneurs. It aims to present mentoring as a dynamic relationship, where experienced businesspeople guide those with less experience to successful business and personal outcomes. An important function of mentoring is to be a role model for women entrepreneurs (Kickel & Gundry, 2006). Women entrepreneurs who participate in mentoring relationship stress the importance of maintaining these relationships due to the positive contributions reflected in their professional and personal growth and development (Browder, 2011). Successful mentoring helps women with decision making while reducing feelings of isolation, and can be a source of inspiration (Woodd, 1997). The mentoring approach has been beneficial to the on-going development of businessperson entrepreneurs.

Women entrepreneurs in this study verified their perceived value from mentoring experiences and reinforced the benefits of developing a transformational leadership style. Participants in the study reported that their mentorship experiences produced positive results in their performance of managing their companies. The women in the study reflected their new-found abilities through shared decision-making. These women learned from their mentors it is very necessary to create, develop, and implement business strategies based on their visions for success. Mentors guided mentees through these processes.

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Mentors helped these women develop vision statements for their professional and personal lives.

A key success factor for these women was their recognition that they needed help and that establishing a mentoring relationship could be a means to their success. These women also demonstrated the personal confidence to reach out to potential mentors and to establish mentor relationships. Mentoring was reported to be a tool these women could use when facing barriers and challenges.

## **Literature**

According to Babson College's (2012) Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 126 million women entrepreneurs are active worldwide. As of 2014, United States' women entrepreneurs own 9.1 million businesses making them the fastest growing segment of entrepreneurs (The American Express, 2014). Women entrepreneurs' businesses contribute \$3 trillion to the economy (Moore, 2014, May). A recurring theme in business literature is a valuable contribution mentors play in helping women entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses (Krotz, 2011).

Mentoring originated back in Greek times. A "mentor was a friend to whom Odysseus entrusted the education of his son, Telemachus" (Bloomberg, 2014, para. 2). According to Parsloe (2009) of the Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring, mentoring supports and encourages people to manage their learning resulting in maximizing their potential, by developing skills, improving their performance, and becoming the person they want to be. Carmin (1988) describes mentoring as "an interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise that incorporate interpersonal or psychosocial development, career, and/or educational development, and socialization functions into their relationship" (p. 4). Mentors typically support entrepreneurs with problem-solving (Kickel & Gundry, 2006).

Mentoring is also described as someone who has been down the same path the mentee is taking (Small Business Association, 2014). According to MindTools (2014), the goal of mentoring is personal and professional development with mentors becoming trusted role models. According to Aubert (2014), role models affect women entrepreneurs' businesses and personal lives serving as learning tools about the business world and themselves. Along with recognition there is a sense of achievement, which improves the mentee's approach and management of their business (MindTools, 2014).

## **Mentoring Women Entrepreneurs**

Mentoring is a dyadic relationship, in which the more experienced person (mentor) provides workplace guidance and support to a less experienced person (mentee) (Ncube & Washburn, 2010). Dragoo, National Chair and Interim CEO of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) (2014), advises choosing a mentor that the mentee looks up to, someone who inspires them, offers smart solutions and fresh perspectives. It is equally important that mentors hold the mentee accountable for their actions or indecisiveness to act.

According to Sandberg (2013), a women entrepreneur mentor needs to be confident in her skills to serve the mentee. The key function of mentors is to be role models for women entrepreneurs (Kickel & Gundry, 2006). Soliciting the help of a mentor provides women entrepreneurs the opportunity and personal growth experience of identifying and acknowledging their need for help. Many of these new mentees may not be able to articulate the type of help they need in building and growth of their business

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when speaking with a potential mentor (Krotz, 2011). Learning from the expertise of a mentor can help mentees avoid making errors in decisions (Krotz, 2011). Mentors as role models are valuable because they counsel women entrepreneurs where they are and help them decide where they want to be in the future. Mentoring enables women entrepreneurs to realize what is possible and attainable (Aubert, 2014). Research conducted by Jandeska and Kraimer (2005) confirmed role-modeling, by women mentors, resulted in a higher level of career satisfaction for women.

According to the U.S. Small Business Association (n.d.), mentors provide hands-on-experience for women entrepreneurs. The benefits of mentoring assimilate success and business growth for women entrepreneurs (Sandberg, 2013). Mentoring is essential in the continuing professional development of entrepreneurs (St-Jean, 2012). Literature confirms access to mentoring as a contributing factor to women's success in business (Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013). Other authors have noted the positive effects of mentoring and networking programs for women's careers (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Vinnecombe & Bank, 2003). Accordingly, companies including American Express, General Electric, Goldman Sachs, Johnson & Johnson, Lehman Brothers, and Time Warner have dedicated resources to building women's networks for helping their female employees build their skills, contacts, and confidence. These mentoring relationships can provide unparalleled training in navigating corporate politics and also giving important access to information. Sociologists and psychologist have long observed the reciprocal behavior of mentees to mentors benefiting both (Sandberg, 2013).

According to Wilen-Daugenti, Vier, and Molina-Ray (2013), finding a mentor should be a prerequisite before beginning a women's career. Women entrepreneurs that experience the mentoring relationship report the importance and contribution the relationship has made to their success (Browder, 2011). Having access to mentors contributes to success (McGrath Cahoon, Wadhwa, & Mitchell, 2010). According to the McGrath, et. al., (2010) study results, a lack of mentors was not a problem for either male or female entrepreneurs in this study (McGrath, et al, 2010). Interestingly, women entrepreneurs had an easier time locating a mentor than did their male counterparts (McGrath, et. al., 2010).

Through the mentoring relationship, women entrepreneurs expect to develop as both business owners and individuals (St-Jean, Audet, 2009). Cope & Watts (2000), posited how important mentor support is in helping entrepreneurs to commit to learning from experience. These learning experiences may help them avoid or mitigate issues in the future (Cope & Watts, 2000). Through mentoring, women entrepreneurs can learn to be more objective while managing their company through a leadership position.

Mentoring can help women with decision-making, reduce the feeling of isolation, and can prove to be aspirational (Woodd, 1997). Koro-Ljunberg & Hayes (2006) found that mentoring develops professional competence. Mentoring transforms into an improved sense of self for women entrepreneurs (Koro-Ljunberg & Hayes, 2006). Heigarrd and Mathisen (2009), acknowledge the mentoring experience improved women entrepreneur's decision-making and improved their overall job satisfaction. It is important for a woman entrepreneur to make decisions and then rely on feedback from her mentor (Sandberg, 2013). Woman entrepreneur mentors are too busy to handhold, because they are dealing with their own high-stress and time constraints of owning a business (Sandberg 2013).

St-Jean and Audet (2009) explored the usefulness of the mentoring approach and the benefits perceived by novice entrepreneurs. Conclusions from the study indicate that the mentee had a higher level of satisfaction when the mentor understands the mentee relationship (St-Jean & Audet, 2009). A

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mentoring relationship requires time and dedication on the part of the mentor (St-Jean & Audet, 2009). There is a unique opportunity for the mentee to develop their leadership knowledge through other women entrepreneurs (Global Business Network blog, n.d.).

According to Klasen & Clutterbuck (2002) effective mentoring programs provide the following for mentees:

- allowing for mentee's own learning objectives
- appreciation of the prior knowledge and experiences of the mentor
- acceptance that all attempts to meet their objectives may not be met, even if the objectives are not met that it is still a positive learning experience even with mistakes
- the understanding that motivation is necessary to achieve reasonable objectives
- understanding hard work and effort, coupled with support and guidance from the mentor that mentees have a better chance of obtaining objectives.

When the mentor provides these conditions, it enhances their development and potential of the mentee (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002).

According to Williams (2011), over half of all women entrepreneurs do not have a mentor. Fifty-one percent of Gen Y women entrepreneurs use mentors, which is up 34% from Baby Boomers (Williams, 2011). Women entrepreneurs do not have mentors for a couple reasons. The reasons provided are not asking a mentor for help (67%), and never encountering an appropriate person to serve as a mentor (52%) (Williams, 2011). According to Olson (2011), women entrepreneurs realize the value of a mentor to get their business on the right course to long-term growth. Women entrepreneurs benefit from mentors who help them align personal goals with business goals (Cull, 2006).

Mentoring is essential in the continuing professional development of entrepreneurs (St-Jean 2012). Mentoring is empowering for women and can support their ability to uniquely be their own selves, the approach is about modeling strategies enabling women to put their unique spin on applying what they have learned (Aubert, 2014). Mentors are a proven resource that can provide a plethora of insights, advice, wisdom, and guidance (Aubert, 2014). The significance of good mentoring is helping women entrepreneurs navigate and network with others in their profession (Brown, Pinderhughes, Simen, Price, & Gillespie, 2013). Kickel (2006) explains mentoring may also assist the management of the business to meet or exceed its goals.

Mentoring is a means of support to women entrepreneurs as they address gaps in their skill sets (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001). The American Express Report on the *State of Women-owned Businesses* (2014) recommends finding a mentor (expert) to fill in gaps of knowledge. Mentors are collaborators who help mentees work through their business and personal issues (Aubert, 2014). Having a mentor can result in very positive outcomes for women entrepreneurs (Aubert, 2014). According to Olsen 2011, a mentoring relationship is vital to ensuring the next generation of women entrepreneurs is successful (Olsen, 2011).

### **Qualities of a Good Mentor**

Toastmasters International (2014), describes a good mentor as taking a personal interest while providing knowledge, insight, perspective, and wisdom. Wilen-Daugenti, Vien & Molina-Ray (2013) advise women entrepreneurs to find someone the mentee admires. "Mentoring is a two-way street. You

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get out what you put in” (Zaleski, 2013). Considering alternative mentoring options allows the mentee to gain different perspectives on decisions (Wilén-Daugente, Vien, et. al., 2013). The mentor’s advice must not conflict with the mentee’s business culture, preferred learning style, or methods of communication (Cope & Watts, 2000).

The *Workplace Mentoring Primer* (2014), describes a good mentor as willing to commit time to mentoring responsibilities, a sincere interest to help others, possessing strong interpersonal communication skills, patience when providing guidance, coaching when needed, sensitivity to cultural diversity and personal differences. Jumpstart is a mentoring program, which started in early 2012. Jumpstart affirms mentoring as a two-way street (Dearborn, 2013). Insights from the Jumpstart program reveal good women entrepreneur mentors share the following characteristics: 1) setting a good example, 2) sharing experiences, 3) lending an ear, 4) open life-long learning, and 5) do not fear of getting to know the mentee on a personal level (Dearborn, 2013). The mentor’s ability to be a good communicator is critical to women mentees (Høigaard & Mathisen, 2009)

The foundation of any mentoring relationship begins with the mentor empathizing and accepting the mentee as a developing professional person (Rowley, 1999). Establishing goals and expectations upfront are important and including a mentoring alliance exit strategy (Krotz, 2011). It is critical to establish a clear understanding of the mentoring relationship (Broward, 2011). Mentors and mentees need to follow the mentoring agreement agreed upon (St-Jean & Audet, 2009).

Mentoring relationships can be formal or informal evolving over time (Brigham and Women’s Hospital, “n.d.”). Writing a formal agreement between the mentor and mentee discusses the important elements of the relationship and creates a more mutually beneficial mentoring experience (Brigham and Women’s Hospital, “n.d.”). Prior to seeking a mentor a mentee should begin by writing down specific expectations and the roles you want a mentor to play (Quast, 2009). Scheduling a meeting is the next step to discuss commitment expectations. A formal or informal agreement can be written. Following the mentoring agreement allows for a greater satisfaction for both the mentor and mentee in the mentoring experience (St-Jean & Audet, 2009).

Trust is an important characteristic that must be present in the relationship for both mentors and mentees (St-Jean, & Audet, 2009). Women entrepreneurs trust their mentors to guide them to meaningful results (St-Jean, Audet, 2009). Sandberg (2013) states young entrepreneurs believe a good mentor helps the mentee to excel, but entrepreneurs who excel will obtain a good mentor.

Mentors can establish a good example for mentees by role modeling. Role modeling allows the mentee to find inspiration through their mentor’s example (Dearborn, 2013). Mentors can help mentees strive to be more successful through role modeling by providing shared experiences beyond workroom conversations (Rowley, 1999). The shared experiences can have a more powerful influence on their mentees (Dearborn, 2013; Rowley, 1999).

Mentors continue to role model through their commitment to continual learning (Rowley, 1999). A mentor’s continual learning involves openness to learning from colleagues, participating in professional development, and committing to ongoing mentor training (Rowley, 1999). A good mentor should be aware of the latest advances in industry (Dearborn, 2013). When a mentor does not have the expertise in an area that mentee needs, she will know whom to direct the women entrepreneur for help (Dearborn,

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2013). Good networking skills on the part of the mentor are helpful in making those connections (Dearbon, 2013).

Each mentoring relationship is a unique interpersonal experience (Rowley, 1999). Instructing the mentor involves balancing a combination of positive and negative perspectives (Cooke & O'Connor, n.d.). According to Hughes, director of the Jumpstart Mentoring Program, a highly effective mentor leads with questions, provides a discovery process to learn new knowledge, goes the extra mile for the mentee, encourages and boosts, and realizes she cannot be everything to the mentee (Zaleksi, 2013).

The mentor improves leadership skills by developing the ability to motivate and encourage others (MindTools, 2014). The success of mentoring involves effective communication, a proper match, setting program guidelines, techniques for observation and feedback, value of the program, and the amount and method of support (Gettys, Martin, Bigby, 2010). A mentor may come from a different communication background forcing the mentor and mentee to communicate effectively (MindTools, 2014). A good mentor communicates the belief that the mentee is capable of transcending present challenges and accomplishing success (Rowley, 1999).

Mentors should share frustrations and how they overcame them (Rowley, 1999). Eleanor Roosevelt once stated, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself" (Legends and Legacy, 2014, para. 3). The mentee learns how to avoid those mistakes from her mentor's experiences.

Sole proprietor women entrepreneurs benefit by using mentors as sounding boards providing valuable advice and shortcuts (Laukhuf 2014). The mentee can learn from the mentor new perspectives and gain opportunities to grow an existing network (MindTools, 2014). The mentoring relationship can also be beneficial to the mentor by building leadership and communication skills, learning new perspectives, advancing career, and gaining personal satisfaction (MindTools, 2014).

Mentors have the experience and ability to identify the skills and expertise to succeed (Laukhuf, 2014). A mentor shows the mentee new ways of thinking improving the mentor's communication skills (MindTools, 2014). Mentors adjust their teaching style and communications to the needs of individual mentees (Rowley, 1999). The mentee can learn from the mentor new perspectives, gain opportunities to grow an existing network, and focus the mentee on a path to success (MindTools, 2014).

At the University of Hertfordshire, in the United Kingdom, a six-month mentoring program was established to help women entrepreneurs obtain an 'ally' or 'critical friend' to bounce ideas off (Ragins & Clutterbuck, 2002). "The women entrepreneurs course helps rebuild their confidence and to develop the practical skills necessary for self-employment" (Ragins & Clutterbuck, 2002, p. 182). The mentoring process begins when the mentor and mentee are face-to-face and then is replaced with support via email and telephone (Ragins & Clutterbuck, 2002). A number of the mentors have written that they too, have grown professionally and personally (Ragins & Clutterbuck, 2002).

## **Types of Mentoring**

Mentoring approaches include traditional, e-Mentoring (virtual), reverse, reciprocal, team (group), or a peer approach (Reid, 2014; Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013; Lenhoff, 2013; Harvey, McIntyre, Thompson Heames, & Moeller, 2009). The alternatives to hierarchical mentoring and one-on-one mentoring include peer mentoring, group mentoring, and even reverse mentoring (Wilén-Daugente, Vient et al,

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2013). Another alternative is e-mentoring (Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013). Hylek (n.d.) encourages multiple mentors to obtain many perspectives.

Traditional mentors provide help in two general areas of career development and psychosocial support (Harvey, et., al, 2009). Traditional mentoring is a formal relationship usually with an older, more experienced person mentoring the less experienced individual (“Workplace Mentoring Primer,” 2014). A key element to traditional mentoring is the potential for a strong, long-term relationship built through trust (“Workplace Mentoring Primer,” 2014). The disadvantage to this type of mentoring is the fear of the mentee saying something negatively to their mentor and this affecting their career growth negatively (“Workplace Mentoring Primer,” 2014).

Virtual mentoring is a contemporary mentoring model is usually used when face-to-face interaction may not be possible (“Workplace Mentoring Primer,” 2014). E-mentoring conceptually links a more experienced mentor to a less experienced mentee similar to traditional mentoring but is independent of geography (Williams, Sunderman, Kim, 2012). The main function of an e-mentor is to present possibilities and the possible outcomes (Williams, et. al., 2012). This (virtual) approach provides for a pool of potential women entrepreneurs that might not be otherwise available (Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013).

The advantages to E-mentoring include flexibility in creating and sustaining relationships and in maintaining open communication minimizing contextual and geographical barriers (Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013). According to Kyrgidou & Petridou (2013), study results show e-mentoring aids mentees to overcome gaps in their knowledge and skills that significantly inhibit women entrepreneurs’ growth. Women entrepreneurs can learn from a mentor who is more knowledgeable and has experienced some of the same challenges she is facing in her own business. Another advantageous result of E-mentoring is an individual change in the E-mentor (Williams, et.al, 2012).

According to Kyrgidou & Petridou 2013, E-mentoring did not seem to acquire extraordinary benefits in terms of knowledge and skills for the mentee. Another disadvantage of E-mentoring is that it does not always allow for constant expanding of knowledge and developing of skills (Kyrgidou & Petridou, 2013). Similar to traditional mentoring, virtual mentoring typically involves one-to-one matching (“Workplace Mentoring Primer,” n.d.). With social networking platforms it is easier to pair up women entrepreneurs mentees who may not have found mentors on their own (Reid, 2014). It is important for the women entrepreneur to do a personal analysis of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to better articulate their needs and expectations of a mentor.

A newer mentoring paradigm, reverse mentoring has materialized. Reverse mentoring is the opposite of traditional mentoring where usually an older, more experienced worker trains a younger worker. In reverse mentoring the younger mentor helps the older mentee learn about technology by helping the older employee understand how technology is changing (Harvey et. al., 2009). The goal of reverse mentoring is to be mutually beneficial (Quast, 2009). This type of mentoring has occurred because of the increasing pace of women in leadership positions and constantly emerging technologies. Women entrepreneurs represent a multigenerational workforce utilizing reverse mentoring because it benefits the mentor, the mentee, and the organization (Kulesz & Smith, 2013). Reverse mentoring can increase human capital (Kulesz & Smith, 2013). A small investment in human capital through a mentoring program allows a mentor to develop their expertise and a mentee to gain and share a wealth of skills, knowledge, and a unique perspective (Esty-Ibarra, 2004).

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Reciprocal mentoring occurs when dynamic information exchanges between the mentor and the mentee (Harvey, et. al., 2009). Reciprocal mentoring, similar to reverse mentoring, involves workers across all generations in the workplace adopting technical tools such as social media, cloud computing, and text usage that will result in streamlined communication and practices (Lenhoff, 2013). Reciprocal mentoring is a two-way or team-building relationship allowing newer, younger employees to impart their knowledge and guidance (Lenhoff, 2013).

Group or team mentoring consists of one or more experienced professionals providing guidance and support to one or more individuals (Zaleski, 2013, March 20; "Workplace Mentoring Primer," n.d.). Mentors and mentees participate in structured activities where the emphasis is on peer interaction ("Workplace Mentoring Primer," n.d.). In this mentoring experience the mentor acts as a group facilitator ("Workplace Mentoring Primer," n.d.). The advantage of this type of mentoring is allowing the mentee to draw on many approaches from different mentors (Dearborn, 2013). Team mentoring allows for different perspectives and strategies with each mentor focusing on his or her strengths helping the woman entrepreneur's business succeed (Zaleski, 2013). The Jumpstart program is an example of a team approach to mentoring (Zaleski, 2013). A disadvantage of group or team mentoring is that it does not allow for a deeper connection that traditional mentoring supports ("Workplace Primer," 2014).

Peer mentoring groups offer women entrepreneurs' opportunities to discuss challenges and maintain a positive outlook (Women's Enterprise Center, n.d.). Groups of six to eight women in non-competing businesses meet and an experienced mentor acts as a group leader (Women's Enterprise Center, n.d.). This type of mentoring is more effective than traditional mentoring ("Workplace Mentoring Primer," 2014).

National research shows that women in peer-to-peer mentoring enjoy a higher success rate and less stress because of support from mentoring peers (Chatham University, n.d.). Mentees can benefit from peer mentoring by receiving personalized advice, improving their business knowledge, receiving an outside perspective, increasing productivity, and growing confidence through support regarding business decisions (Women's Enterprise Center, n.d.). Group mentoring provides an opportunity for expansion of topics and issues of participating mentees.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was used in the study. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to investigate the lived experiences of participants experiencing a certain phenomenon allowing insight into a worldview (Creswell, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). According to Marshall and Rossman (2011) this type of study "rests on the assumption that there are a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated" (p. 148). The real world versus our perception is the basis for a phenomenological study (Willis, 2007). The choice of a phenomenological study was the correct one for the type of information wanted because it identifies the phenomena through the perceptions of the individuals in the situation (Lester, 1999). A qualitative phenomenological study was appropriate for the information as the researcher wanted to obtain regarding the essence of mentoring for women entrepreneurs.

This qualitative phenomenological study of 22 women entrepreneurs occurred during 2012 and 2013, verifying the perceived value of a mentorship experience, and a transformational leadership style complemented the process. The interviews were conducted via face-to-face, telephone, and Skype. The

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person-to-person shared life experience reported through in-depth interview questions is what makes phenomenological research valid (Moustakas, 1994). After collection of qualitative data, there is no consistent right way to analyze the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Willis, 2007). Inductive reasoning involving many specific observations and drawing inferences about larger and more general phenomena occurs (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The answers of the women entrepreneurs were coded with the importance of mentoring emerging from the data results as important to the success of women entrepreneurs (Laukhuf, 2014).

The data collection for the study began prior to starting the project by writing down known knowledge on the topic and what issues appeared beneficial. According to Polit and Beck (2010), qualitative research involves a few individuals or cases eliciting in-depth information about the individual's experiences. The following protocol was adhered to limiting bias in the study: Self-critical and self-aware (reflective) of personal values allowing for no bias in data collection, remaining curious and quizzical of participants while understanding the phenomenon, make sure all participants understood all terms, openness in interpretation of peers, researcher was honest and transparent (trustworthiness), and took ownership of analysis in the study (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

After collection of the data in qualitative research, there is no consistent right way to analyze the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Qualitative researchers make considerable use of inductive reasoning involving specific observations and drawing inferences about larger and more general phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). It is a process with steps (Willis, 2007). The process began with managing the data. The data was collected through recorded interviews either by telephone, Skype, or in-person. The researcher transcribed the recorded interview statements within 24 hours to allow for accuracy. A summary of the demographics and responses was analyzed with the HyperResearch software.

All 22 women entrepreneur participants (100%) used mentors to help grow their business. The initial exploratory analysis consisted of obtaining a general sense of the data. The demographic categories coded were industry, years in business, number of employees and use of subcontractors, annual revenues, education, and leadership style, and use of mentoring.

## Findings and Discussion

Six main themes emerged from the qualitative phenomenological study conducted via recorded interviews. Analysis of the data through data coding identified the following six themes:

**Table 1: Emerging Themes**

Themes	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Theme 1: Mentorship experience	22	100%
Theme 2: Leadership Style	21	95%
Theme 3: Advice for Other Women Entrepreneurs	21	95%
Theme 4: Barriers and Challenges	18	82%
Theme 5: Success Factors	18	82%
Theme 6: Sexism	12	55%

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**Theme 1 - Mentorship experience.** Those women entrepreneurs who did not have a designated mentor when starting her business described soliciting advice from a range of business owners before opening her own business (Laukhuf, 2014). Participants acknowledged they had mentors ranging from parents, friends, and family members. These sources can often prove to be very reliable due to their limited business knowledge and need to be viewed as a positive by the individual. These reference groups often tend to tell the women entrepreneur what they think she wants to hear rather than what the true facts are. Women entrepreneurs enlisting the help of mentors are usually more successful in making business decisions because of the guidance from their mentors (Laukhuf, 2014). Many women's business associations help women find mentors. Women entrepreneurs interviewed in the Laukhuf study did not express a preference for a woman or a man mentor (Laukhuf, 2014).

Women entrepreneurs who have experienced mentors during the nascent stages of entrepreneurship reported being better able to overcome business problems (Ncube & Wasburn, 2010). Mentoring programs encourage women entrepreneurs to grow businesses to the next level by pushing women entrepreneurs to be confident in growing businesses (Ramaswami & Mackiewicz, 2009). Kickul, Gundry, and Iakovieva (2006) found mentoring role models positively associated with entrepreneurial firm performance. Self-efficacy also positively relates to firm performance especially for women entrepreneurs (Kickul et al., 2006). Additionally, results of the *Women and Success Survey* indicated that mentoring was noted as a success factor by respondents (Bahnisch, 2006).

**Theme 2 - Leadership style:** "Leadership is using the greatness in you to achieve and sustain extraordinary outcomes by engaging the greatness in others" (Colantuono & Baldwin, 2010, p. 6). Participants described their leadership style in the Laukhuf study. Ten of the 22 women (45%) described their leadership style as participative and transformational, meaning that they collaborated with their partners and employees, empowered employees to act and encouraged employee input, and, in some cases, shared decision-making authority (Laukhuf, 2014). The other leadership styles revealed from the data results were: Hands-on-experience, six women (27%); Directive/provided expertise, five women (23%); Strategic and visions, five women (23%); and Servant leadership one woman (5%).

Hands-on-experience women entrepreneur leaders lead by example and are involved in every aspect of the work. One participant of this leadership style stated, "I like to wear all the hats in the business...I am the facilitator. This women entrepreneur stated she is the facilitator and coach for my services as well."

Directive/provided expertise leadership style involves a leadership style where the women entrepreneur have the expertise her employees do not. This women entrepreneur leader uses her experience to lead her company. This leadership style has the needed experience to run her business and may not have formal training.

Strategic and Visionary women entrepreneurs lead by where they choose to be in the future (Lavinsky, 2013). This women entrepreneur then determines the steps needed to get there (Lavinsky, 2013). Discipline and creativity are needed in creating and sustaining a vision for this type of organization (Lavinsky, 2013).

Servant Leadership involves the women entrepreneur combining characteristics of a servant with those of a leader (McCuddy & Calvin, 2008). The servant leader seeks to help others to succeed (Vinod & Sudhaker, 2011). This women entrepreneur leads through teaching and coaching individuals bringing out their best (Vinod & Sudhaker, 2011).

**Theme 3 - Advice for other women entrepreneurs.** Participants were asked to identify their recommendations for other women entrepreneurs. The most commonly cited piece of advice (64% of participants) was to define one's vision of success and design and grow the business accordingly. Many participants emphasized the importance of deciding what kind of work-life balance one wanted and then creating a suitable business model to achieve it. Women entrepreneurs do not have a 9 to 5 job so learning how to balance work and home life is important.

**Theme 4 - Barriers and challenges.** Analysis of the participants' interview responses resulted in the identification of seven challenges they faced while growing their businesses. The challenges were dealing with the economic downturn, creating customer demand, getting funding, dealing with the all-consuming nature of self-employment, attracting talent, dealing with intense competition, overcoming a lack of leadership training, education, and grooming.

**Theme 5 - Success factors.** Twelve of the 22 participants (55%) emphasized the importance of soliciting help from knowledgeable others. Advisory boards, business coaches, mentors, and others with valuable expertise were used. Participant's mentors were key individuals in women entrepreneurs professional and personal business growth and successes.

**Theme 6 -Sexism.** Laukhuf expressly inquired about participants' experiences with sexism related to their businesses. A total of nine participants (41%) reported experiences of sexism. Seven participants (32%) believed they suffered a lack of credibility because they were women—especially if they were in a male-dominated field. The general advice from women entrepreneurs interviewed was to ignore any sexism and not let it get in your way.

Information from the Laukhuf (2014) study and additional literature research shows many benefits of mentoring. A study in Europe (2013), recommends women entrepreneurs use a strengths-based mentoring approach (Stavropoulou & Protopapa, 2013). This leading edge approach allows a woman entrepreneur to discover her strengths and use them to achieve goals (Stavropoulou & Protopapa, 2013). Women entrepreneurs face many barriers as stated and this approach allows the woman entrepreneur mentor to introduce the mentee to a positive psychology perspective (Stavropoulou & Protopapa, 2013). This perspective enables the women entrepreneur to build on her strengths by recognizing, identifying, understanding, and applying this knowledge to different roles and phases of business growth (Stavropoulous & Protopapa, 2013). Women entrepreneurs found a lot of resources while starting their businesses, but felt that they were left alone to grow their business (Laukhuf 2014).

Rueywei, Shih-Ying, and Ming-Lang (2014) studied the mediating effects of mentoring. They concluded that mentoring was a crucial element of personal learning and effective career advancement (Rueywei, Shih-Ying, & Ming-Lang, 2014). The study results of Rueywei, Shih-Ying, and Ming-Lang's (2014) study confirmed personal learning and mentoring had a significant positive effect on career development.

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LeBlanc (2013) conducted a qualitative study on the effects of mentoring on successful entrepreneurs. The participants in LeBlanc's study indicated that mentoring was essential for success (LeBlanc, 2013). LeBlanc's study confirmed, as did the Laukhuf study, that entrepreneurs used family and close friends as mentors and perceived the importance of this support system (Laukhuf, 2014; LeBlanc, 2013).

Lanna-Lipton (2009) researched the relationship between mentoring and career advancement of millennial-generation women in leadership. The study indicated the positive results mentoring can produce on the development of transformational leadership skills (Lanna-Lipton, 2009). Lanna-Lipton's (2009) study also revealed a relationship between mentoring and emotional intelligence.

Ncube and Washburn's (2010) case study of women entrepreneurs' strategic collaboration and mentoring reveal strategic collaboration benefits participants in the same way as traditional mentoring arrangements and avoids many difficulties. The strategic collaboration-mentoring program provided positive outcomes (Ncube & Washburn, 2010). This mentoring program provided "participants with the opportunity to network and strategize with other women business owners." The support, encouragement, and friendship developed from one another (Ncube & Washburn, 2010).

Mentored individuals reported greater job and career satisfaction, faster rates of promotion, higher salaries and better organizational socialization (Ncube & Washburn, 2010).

The studies mentioned show the benefits of mentoring for women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs gain positive outcomes of better decision-making, leadership skills, networking opportunities, self-confidence, filling knowledge gaps, and help in obtaining their goals. All these benefits contribute to the success and long-term growth of their businesses.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

The implications for future research include continuing research on the link of transformational leadership and mentoring. This study was conducted with Ohio women entrepreneurs. Another study could be conducted in other states to see if the same results occur. Is transformational leadership and mentoring as important in other areas of the United States as in Ohio?

Another approach to future studies includes the need to understand why women entrepreneurs choose not to pursue a mentor. A large number of women entrepreneurs have not established a mentoring relationship. These women too often rely on personal reference groups for professional guidance. Why do these women continue to rely on family and friends for advice and guidance with the businesses? What barriers are keeping more women entrepreneurs from establishing mentoring relationships?

### **Conclusion**

A mentor is a good investment for women entrepreneurs who desire to grow professionally and personally. Women entrepreneurs' benefit from recognition and a sense of achievement, which improves the management of their business. There is a need for women entrepreneurs to align personal goals with business goals (Cull, 2006). Trust is an important characteristic that must be present in the relationship for both mentees and mentors. The importance of mentoring of women entrepreneurs has always been known (Sandberg 2003).

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Women entrepreneurs expect visible results from mentoring relationships (St-Jean, Audet, 2009). Through mentoring, women entrepreneurs can learn to be more objective while managing their company through a leadership position. Women entrepreneurs show a desire to give back to their community and mentoring is one of those avenues. Mentoring is a dynamic field that continues to develop and offer newfound benefits to mentors and mentees. Women entrepreneurs can uniquely benefit from mentoring.

The significance of the study is reflected through the mentoring experiences reported to be helpful in the personal development and business growth of mentored women entrepreneurs. The theory of mentoring was expanded by these women who developed stronger transformational leadership competencies. Their lived experiences of running a business through transformational leadership suggests women entrepreneurs need to find a good balance between their career and personal life. The practice of mentoring was said to help them face their challenges and proactively confront barriers. A key success factor was reported to be the ability to ask for help. These women entrepreneurs also learned sexism should not distract them from their mission of running a successful business.

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