

5-2012

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Recommended Citation

Peterson, Kathryn H., "Effective Social Capital Strategies for Early Career Development of Women in the Hospitality and Tourism Management Field" (2012). *College of Health and Human Sciences Honors Program Undergraduate Theses*. Paper 5.

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**EFFECTIVE SOCIAL CAPITAL STRATEGIES FOR EARLY CAREER
DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM
MANAGEMENT FIELD**

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Hospitality and Tourism Management)

College of Health and Human Sciences

Purdue University

May 2012

West Lafayette, Indiana

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Introduction

The present research examines the effect of mentors and professional networks on the careers of young professional women in the hospitality industry. The ratio of women in top management positions is incredibly low compared to the percentage of women in the workforce. Women only account for 20% of the top executives when women are 48% of the entire workforce (Arnst, 2008). While there is research pertaining to women in management positions, research about women in the hospitality industry is scarce. Examination of the value of the characteristics of professional relationships, the challenges that women must overcome, and the most valuable approach for obtaining professional relationships so women in hospitality can advance their careers in management are critical.

Review of Literature

“Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person.” –Mother Teresa. Some people believe that success comes from who one knows and not what one knows. More than likely, what one knows, from whom one knows creates success. The difference between having an effective or mediocre career can be determined for young professionals in what external tools they possess. Effectiveness has been described as “doing the right things” (Certo & Certo, 2009; Robbins & Coulter, 2012). Being effective means to “achieve results, to make the right decisions and successfully carry them out to achieve ... goals” (Kiniki & Williams, 2009, p. 5). Professional women looking to build their careers use two techniques to do so mentors and networks. As women, these young professionals also encounter challenges that they must overcome.

Social Capital Explained

“The World Bank defines social capital as the ‘norms and social relations embedded in social structures that enable people to coordinate action and to achieve desired goals’” (Cohen and Prusak, 2001, p. 3). “It refers to the collective value of all social networks and then trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation generated by those social networks” (Timberlake, 2004, p. 35). Social capital relies on people coming together for a common purpose and helping one another to help themselves. Social capital is built by “helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives” (Day, 2001, p. 591). While social capital can be built in a multitude of ways, the present research examines networking activities and the development of mentor relationships. The study will examine these specific activities in the context of building the social capital necessary to be effective.

Definition of a Mentor

To better understand the techniques that a young business professional uses, one must first understand the techniques themselves. The following are professionals’ definitions of a mentor and a network. “Mentorship is a personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced person takes a less experienced person ‘under their wing’” (Beckett, 2010, p. 21). A senior manager who provides emotional support, guidance, and sponsorship to a less experienced person can be considered a mentor (Kirchmeyer, 1995, p. 72). “A mentor is someone in a position of power who looks out for you, or gives you advice, or brings your accomplishments to the attention of other people who have power in the company” (Fagenson, 1989, p. 315).

“Someone, other than your manager or immediate coworkers, who provides you with technical or career advice, coaching, or information on an informal basis” (Seibert, 1999, p. 487).

Importance of Mentoring

Mentors are typically senior executives who provide guidance to young professionals to ensure their growth in the company. Mentoring can be a vital part of a professional’s career because of what it can offer to the mentee. According to DeLong, Gabarro, and Lees (2008), mentoring is important to a company in order to retain junior employees. By mentoring employees, a company can keep them longer and help them grow. DeLong, Gabarro, and Lees (2008) believe that “young professionals are looking for mentors who can give them advice, encouragement, and space to grow” (p. 117). When employees feel valued by an organization and know that their future with the company is considered, they tend to stay and grow within the company instead of looking for opportunities elsewhere. DeLong, Gabarro, and Lees (2008) confirm that belief by saying, “When plums are not available, the junior professionals grow frustrated that the partnership group is not really interested in their career development. They also don’t believe that HR will represent their best interests. That’s where the mentor comes in” (p. 120). Putting the investment into employees’ futures can be beneficial to both the individual and the company.

Importance of Mentoring to Women

Mentorship is also an important part of a woman’s career because a mentor can provide her with the gender specific career advice she needs. A woman mentor to a woman mentee can be helpful specifically because they have similar experiences and share similar challenges. Beckett (2010) found that “one of the greatest benefits of a mentoring relationship is the knowledge that there’s a place to turn when the job gets tough. In many cases, the mentor may

have experienced the problem previously or may be experiencing the difficulties... but with the benefit of past experience” (p. 22). Women can have difficulty creating a balance between work and life; having a mentor can help ease the stress and offer solutions (Applebaum, 2005, p. 26).

How to Build Mentor Relationships

Mentor programs are different within each company and each relationship. Mentoring can be conducted by having a structured program that the company follows with each junior leader or more informal mentor relationships. A structured program allows every junior leader the opportunity to have a mentor and regulates what junior leaders are taught. An informal mentor relationship can be one where the mentor does not follow any guidelines or procedure. An employee can choose her mentor in some situations and other times mentors are assigned. According to DeLong, Gabarro, and Lees (2008), junior leaders sometimes pursue their own mentors. Beckett (2010) agreed with DeLong, Gabarro, and Lees (2008) by saying, “The key to finding a good mentor is to seek out someone who has the skill set, personal qualities, or career that you aspire to have. Identifying the characteristics you seek may be difficult and all the more reason to establish a mentor relationship” (p. 22). For mentors to be effective, mentoring should be personal. Mentees’ should be asked what they want to get out of the experience and their interests. Mentors should consider the mentees’ career aspirations and goals (DeLong, Gabarro, and Lees, 2008, p. 121). In that way, the mentee can get as much as possible out of the relationship. Mentees also find it helpful to receive feedback often from their mentors. Feedback can be given in any form and usually does not have to be extensive to continue to inspire the mentee. Mentors can take in many different forms; even colleagues can have mentor like qualities and offer advice to co-workers.

Challenges Women Face with Mentors

Women can find it more difficult to acquire a mentor because in some cases, they are undervalued in the workplace. If women are not as commonly found in senior executive roles in a company, it can send the wrong message to women that they are not as likely to be promoted into those positions (Durbin, 2011). Also, if there are no women to be mentors and only male mentors, this can be discouraging and send the wrong message to women. Such a situation can create a challenge to women because working closely with a man can be seen in bad taste. Also, there is the risk for internal relationships which can be against company policy. Women having men as mentors also can be difficult because of differences in beliefs and experiences (Durbin, 2011). In addition, women are not mentored as often because some companies do not believe that they will be with the company as long as their male counterparts due to family circumstances.

Definition of a Professional Network

“A business network is a collection of people, preferably with a broad array of experience and knowledge, to which an individual is connected and with which the individual is in periodic contact. Ideally, any member of this network would answer an email request for help within 24 hours” (Byham, 2010, p. 65). Networking is seen as “creating a fabric of personal contacts that will provide support, feedback, insight, resources, and information” (Ibarra, Hunter, 2007, p. 40). “Market intelligence or a network is the aggregate of information about a particular market and the strategic use of that information to grow the firm” (Crosley, 2011, p. 40).

Importance of Networking

Professional networks are formed between people to help provide assistance in a professional capacity such as advice, new employment opportunities, or promotions. Such networks can be formed within a professional’s field or even outside of one’s expertise to help

round out one's knowledge base. Byham (2010) thought that this benefit is important because it allows for the young professional to "share the best practices; align people or units; and be able to make fast, accurate, decisions" (p. 66). Networks are important to young professionals because they provide contacts that can be useful to them throughout their career. Ibarra and Hunter (2007) demonstrated this by saying "networks include not only direct reports and superiors but also peers within an operational unit, other internal players with the power to block or support a project, and key outsiders such as suppliers, distributors, and customers. The purpose of this networking is to ensure coordination and cooperation among people who have to know and trust one another in order to accomplish their immediate tasks" (p. 41). Networking can be built within an organization where an employee already works and kept long afterwards to help ensure further career success.

Importance of Networking to Women

Networking is very important to women in particular because senior management has a very pronounced gender segregation line and is a place where women are poorly represented (Durbin, 2011). In an environment where women do not commonly hold senior management roles, networking becomes more important for women's upward mobility. Networks offer women the type of support that they need to find the answers and information to advance their careers. They provide women with a large range of contacts in their own field and in other fields. Thus more opportunities are presented to them to make lasting connections that can help advance their careers more quickly. As a minority in the executive world, women must be well connected to stay on the cutting edge of the hospitality and tourism industry.

How to Build Professional Networks

Networking can be conducted at events, special interest groups, meetings, and conventions. It can be very informal such as beginning a conversation with a stranger on an airplane and exchanging business cards. Or networking can be very formal such as attending events conducted for the sole purpose of building connections. According to Uzzi and Dunlap (2005), networks allow professionals to have access to private information. With this private information, professionals can make better decisions and have an advantage over others. Networks can give professionals contact to a diverse set of skills as well. Having a diverse network is a professional's advantage because it allows them to have more complete, creative, unbiased views and ideas (Uzzi, Dunlap, 2005, p. 55). If the network is composed of likeminded people, it can cause a lack of opposing ideas. Without a diverse network, a professional can deter her success. Networks allow of the growth of both the individual and the company because the professional has a way to solve problems by looking outside the company, allowing for fresh ideas. Uzzi and Dunlap (2005) presented another effective way to build network relationships with the shared activities principle, "Potent networks are not forged through casual interactions but through relatively high stakes activities that connect you with diverse others." High stakes activities can include serving on committees within the company, special interest organizations outside the company, and government led events. Mentors and networks provide women with the information and support they need but not without their own challenges.

Challenges Women Face Concerning Networking

Professional women can face challenges when building their professional networks. Networking can take time and require a professional to be involved in extra activities after work. Women can face challenges in that many women work a second shift at home so they cannot spend as much time socializing after work. Women can appear, then, less committed or less

interested in building their network. Also women have a disadvantage because networking can sometimes take place while playing golf or cards and women do not necessarily have those skill sets. (Durbin, 2011) Men also might feel uncomfortable taking part in those activities with women.

Literature Summary

The review of extant literature exposes what other researchers consider important factors in building professional relationships. It touches on the different relationships that professionals can have with one another and various strategies a professional can use to obtain these relationships. The research review also discussed the importance of professional relationships to women in particular and some of the challenges they face.

Research Questions

The present research study explores four key questions about social capital development for young women in the hospitality and tourism industry. Those questions include the following:

1. What were the characteristics of highly effective relationships for women in early career development?
2. What were the most effective techniques used by women in their early career to develop professional relationships?
3. What challenges did women have to overcome when developing these professional relationships?
4. When considering networking and mentoring relationships which technique was most important for improving the effectiveness of women in their early career in the hospitality and tourism industry?

Methodology

The exploratory research method was used for the present study. This was conducted by asking a series of questions through personal interviews with senior women professionals in the field of hospitality and tourism management. The qualitative research allowed for the discussion of themes or trends through conversations (Patten, 2004, p. 20). Personal interviews allowed a researcher to acquire information difficult to obtain through other methods. Interviews offered flexibility while asking questions. If someone does not understand the questions or a follow up question is needed, interviewing allows a researcher to delve more deeply. Interviews allow the researcher to better understand the interviewee's background and read body language that otherwise would not be noticed by other data collection techniques such as surveys (Salkind, 2009, p. 196).

Interviews have two types of questions typically asked, structured and unstructured. Structured questions, also known as close-ended questions, have a clear answer in relatively few words. Unstructured questions, also known as open-ended questions, allow the interviewee to respond in detail to questions. Interviews allow the researcher to apply the information they have gathered through the literature review as well (Salkind, 2009, p. 195).

The research sample consisted of eight women in the hospitality industry, ranging from young professionals to experienced professionals. The interviews were conducted from March 29, 2012 to April 9, 2012. The data was collected by the researcher taking accurate notes of the women's responses and quoting verbatim when necessary. Then data was analyzed by comparing responses across interviews. Responses were coded using the most repeated phrases or words from 1 to 5, 5 being the most common responses. Such an approach allowed the researcher to review the responses that were most common and therefore most important.

Results and Discussion

The preliminary results of the study explain what today's women managers in the hospitality and tourism industry believe are the most effective strategies to build social capital. The challenges they may need to overcome are identified as well.

Networking

Networking allows women managers to make connections with people inside and outside their industries. When looking at the most effective characteristics of networking relationships, 87% of the responses by the women managers indicated that having a network diverse in demographics and fields was the most effective characteristic. This could mean having multiple networks for different reasons or having one large network to function in multiple ways. The managers also believe that another important characteristic of networking is communication when the contact is initiated and keeping in touch with the contact. These contacts can provide future opportunities and can provide a source of knowledge for women. When the managers were asked about the most effective techniques for young women building their networks, seven out of eight managers said the most effective technique was "to put yourself out there" and get involved outside one's company. A total of 87.5% of the managers believed that another vital technique was to serve on committees, attend training sessions within one's company, and become an active member in the Chamber of Commerce- all ways to get involved outside of one's company. Another important technique suggested by 75% of managers surveyed was to keep connected to previous employers and keep positive contacts. A Human Resource manager, said, "*For every position I have had, I have either been recommended or found by a previous employer.*" She stressed how important it was to make good contacts and keep them. Women, in particular, can face challenges when building and retaining their networks. For women during

the early stages of their career, 37.5% of the managers believed that a significant challenge was not having the experiences or connections to draw on to build their network. Their suggestion to overcome this challenge was to make strong connections with upper level managers and co-workers. All of the managers believed that time was the largest challenge that young women managers face, because of their busy schedules and keeping a balance between work and home life. To overcome this challenge the managers suggested that young managers choose a networking activity that best fits their networking needs to maximize time spent.

Mentoring

Each woman manager was asked if they had a mentor when developing her career; each one of them said that they did. Each manager had a different experience in gaining that mentor; no two relationships were exactly alike. This showed that mentor relationships were an important part of a woman's social capital. Mentor relationships can benefit both the mentor and the mentee. The mentee needs to know what she wants from the relationship prior to engaging a mentor. A total of 62.5% of the managers believed that the most important characteristic of highly effective mentor relationships were having clear expectations, being open, and following up. A General Manager, believes, *"The mentor relationship needs to suit both individuals; the mentor needs to have proven successful and the mentee needs to be open to change."* When the mentor and the mentee understand what each other hopes to gain from the relationship, it can function more effectively. Having a mentor in the same discipline can provide the mentee with valuable knowledge. This type of relationship should always be kept professional and the mentee needs to be willing to receive feedback from their mentor. When examining the most effective technique for building a mentor relationship, 75% of the managers surveyed believed that a mentee should seek a mentor on their own who should be a manager or executive with whom

share a similar personality or career goals. Another perspective is that it may be beneficial to have a mentor with different strengths and a different field of interest to allow a mentee to see and learn a new point of view. The most common challenge that young women managers have when developing mentor relationships is finding a mentor who the mentee can admire and share similar personalities. One manager thought that a challenge women face was a disconnect between older and younger generations which caused challenges with communication through technology. The suggestion to meet this challenge is to agree on a method of communication in advance.

Networking versus Mentoring

All of the managers agreed that social capital was very important to anyone's career, but especially young managers. A Senior Vice President of Customer Solutions said, *"I do believe that networking and mentoring relationships are important if you want to see your career progress and if you want to be truly satisfied with your work life."* The managers believed that developing social capital early will improve the effectiveness of a woman's career. Given the busy schedules of young managers, the managers were asked which social capital technique they believe to be most important when building career effectiveness and how important they believed social capital is to one's career. Five out of the eight managers believed that, for early career success, having a mentor to guide decisions and answer questions was the most important technique. The women supported their perspective by saying that mentors provide knowledge and insight that managers cannot and will not get anywhere else. An Assistant General Manager adds, *"Mentoring provides self-fulfillment and will challenge a manager in their actual position each day."* No managers thought that networking alone was the best technique, but three believed that young managers need networking and mentoring to build their careers. These

managers believed that the two methods work together because a mentor can network with someone and a network can introduce one to a network.

Social capital is an important aspect of a manager's career and may be developed effectively for young women managers through network and mentor relationships. Each manager's career is different and can call for various strategies when building social capital. There will be challenges that managers might need to overcome concerning their social capital relationships. Overall, mentor and network relationships are important aspects of a young woman manager's career building in the hospitality and tourism management.

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