

Can Mentorship Improve Socio-emotional Skills for Women in the Workplace?

By Pamela Uzoma



Picture source; LAP Bootcamp 2024 cohort

Introduction

Did you know that organisations with mentorship programmes experience an increase in employee representation of women by 9% to 24%? Despite this, research shows that 63% of women have never had a formal mentor. Meanwhile, 79% of millennials believe mentoring is crucial for a successful career, and those with mentors are twice as likely to stay with their organisation for over five years.¹ These numbers highlight the untapped potential of mentorship, particularly in shaping socio-emotional skills critical for leadership and workplace success.

Mentorship is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “the activity of giving a younger or less experienced person help and advice over a period of time, especially at work or school.”² In practice, mentorship could be described as a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in which an experienced individual

¹ <https://www.cih.org/blogs/mentoring-statistics-in-2022-everything-you-need-to-know>

² <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mentorship>



(the mentor) provides guidance, advice, and support to a less experienced person (the mentee) in order to enhance the mentee's personal and professional development.

In Africa, cultural biases, limited access to mentorship, and insufficient workplace support often exacerbate these gaps. To address these issues, the **Leadership Accelerator Programme (LAP)** by [LEAP Africa](#) is setting a new standard for equipping young African women with the socio-emotional skills and leadership tools necessary to thrive in corporate settings. This article highlights the transformative role mentorship plays in developing these skills and offers practical steps organisations can take to foster mentorship programmes that empower women in the workplace.

Mentorship as a Catalyst for Socio-Emotional Growth

Socio-emotional skills—such as self-awareness, adaptability, and interpersonal communication—are vital for effective leadership.³ The LAP emphasises these through its mentorship framework. Participants are either paired with experienced mentors or are involved in mentorship sessions that guide them in overcoming workplace challenges and navigating gender-based obstacles.

The LAP uses mentorship as a cornerstone to transform participants' socio-emotional skills. Combining a **blended learning approach** from virtual courses, to physical bootcamps, to short films from SIMA Academy and including safe space sessions at its boot camps, the programme emphasises real-world scenarios, expert insights, and interactive learning which has impacted over 5000 young African women. This multi-dimensional approach addresses the unique challenges these women face in climbing the corporate ladder.

For instance, one participant from the 2023 cohort shared how her mentor helped her overcome **imposter syndrome** by affirming her skills and accomplishments. Through personalized feedback sessions, the mentor encouraged her to embrace her leadership potential, empowering her to take on challenging projects with confidence.

Another participant highlighted how the mentorship sessions during the boot camp provided strategies to **address gender biases** in her workplace. She was coached on presenting ideas assertively during team meetings, ensuring her voice was heard and respected in a male-dominated environment. This guidance enabled her to advocate for her ideas effectively, resulting in her being selected to lead a high-visibility project.

Mentors also played an essential role in **fostering team collaboration**. During the 2024 cohort boot camp, one participant shared her experience with peer mentorship, where she received valuable advice on creating an inclusive team environment. This guidance included practical strategies for resolving conflicts and promoting open communication, which she believed would enhance workplace harmony and bolster her team's overall performance.

³ <https://hbr.org/2023/06/a-better-approach-to-mentorship>



These examples demonstrate how mentorship through LAP transcends skill acquisition. It focuses on fostering a sense of empowerment, belonging, and leadership capability in participants.

Practical Steps for Organisations to Leverage Mentorship

To maximise the impact of mentorship on socio-emotional skill development for women in the workplace, organisations must take intentional steps to integrate mentorship into their professional development frameworks.

⁴Below are some practical strategies that organisation can adopt to create a supportive and empowering environment:

- **Establish Formal Mentorship Programmes:**

Organisations can create structured mentorship initiatives, pairing women with experienced mentors who can offer tailored guidance and support.

- **Incorporate Socio-Emotional Skill Training:**

Beyond technical skills, mentorship programmes should include workshops or sessions focused on empathy, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence.

- **Encourage Peer Mentorship:**

Peer mentorship, where colleagues support one another, can also enhance socio-emotional skills. Women in similar career stages can exchange experiences, provide feedback, and grow together.

- **Recognize and Reward Mentorship:**

By celebrating successful mentorship relationships, organisations reinforce their commitment to professional development and socio-emotional skill-building.

Conclusion

Beyond the individual, the Leadership Accelerator Programme creates ripple effects within organisations and communities. Empowered women, equipped with enhanced socio-emotional skills and mentorship experiences, are better positioned to mentor others, advocate for inclusive workplace policies, and challenge systemic biases. By building a network of informed, confident, and skilled women leaders, the LAP not only addresses immediate leadership gaps but also contributes to a broader movement for sustainable gender equity in leadership.

As one LAP alumna put it:

"This programme didn't just give me tools—it gave me the confidence to use them. I no longer see

⁴ <https://hbr.org/2020/07/why-your-mentorship-program-isnt-working>



leadership as something reserved for others; I see it as a role I'm ready to embrace."