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## JOURNAL REPORTS: LEADERSHIP

# For Career Advice, Women Seek Mentors Outside Their Companies

Unable to get the guidance they need in the office, they are going to other organizations for help



The Working Women's Club hosts networking events in London and offers online career training. PHOTO: THE WW CLUB

By *Amber Burton*

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Many young women still in the early years of their careers say they can't get the kind of mentoring they want at the office. So they're leaving the building to find it.

The quest for sage advice about work, life and balancing the two is taking more ambitious, creative women to organizations outside of their human-resources departments, such as OKREAL, which runs mentoring circles in big cities including New York and San Francisco, and the Black Women's Collective, based in Phoenix, which hosts intensive workshops that provide attendees with career coaching.

Phoebe Lovatt, founder of the Working Women's Club, which hosts networking events in London and provides online career training, says she is hearing from a lot of younger women in the digital workforce that they are having a hard time finding mentors of either sex because no one inside their company has done their job before.

"The reality is that a lot of the questions we might have about work are actually not going to be able to be answered by our seniors, as it were, simply because the professional world is evolving so fast right now," she says.

For clients of the Working Women's Club, seeking advice on how to set boundaries, embrace healthier ways of working and take a break from electronic devices is just as important as finding practical resources on how to pitch an idea, Ms. Lovatt says.

"I think women take a much more holistic approach to life satisfaction generally," she says. "We can be driven by different ideas of what a good life looks like, and work is obviously part of that, but it isn't so much the case that we want to work a million hours a week."

Amy Fraser, founder of OKREAL, says today's mentorship programs can look a lot more like



## WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

This article is part of a Wall Street Journal special report on women, men and work based on a study by LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Co.

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group therapy than they have in the past.

“I think a slightly antiquated idea of mentorship is that you find a woman who is 10 years your senior and you meet with her every two weeks and you talk about what you’re going through,” Ms. Fraser says.

OKREAL is rooted in the idea that women often need somewhere to talk about their changing workplace that doesn’t hinge on their specific office or job. Women must apply to attend, and Ms. Fraser handpicks and curates the mentoring circles to consist of seven women whose goals and aspirations mirror one another.

Trisha Goyal, a 25-year-old product developer, was looking for a more tailored system of support and guidance as she tried to advance in her career while also pursuing other passions outside of work. She came upon OKREAL while scrolling through Instagram in 2016.

“We all walked in with similar intentions,” Ms. Goyal says, adding that in the office it would have been hard to open up and discuss side projects or the possibility of moving to a new company or industry. “I think the tension for everybody was either trying to figure out what they’re truly passionate about and what their next move should be, whether that’s career-wise, personally or a side hustle,” she says.

Ms. Goyal consulted with her OKREAL circle as she worked through a job change and eventually left her position to work full time on her own business. With Ms. Fraser, she says, she was able to freely talk without being judged and without it leading anywhere.

Like many young women today, Ms. Goyal says she feels the pressure of balancing a growing career with side projects and a busy personal life, not always knowing how each facet of her life should mix.

“I think a lot of women, in general, are pretty afraid to let their guard down because there’s so much more expectation—especially now,” she says.

Felicia Davis, 49 years old and the founder of the Black Women's Collective, felt a similar pressure. As a former human-resources executive, she suffered what she described as two stress-induced strokes.

“What was even more disappointing about it was that I had had the first stroke and didn't even realize it because I was so busy being busy,” says Ms. Davis, who had to relearn how to walk, talk and write after the second stroke. She credits the experience as the catalyst for reclaiming her life—something she wanted to help others do, too.

“I made the commitment that I would teach women not only how to lead on their own terms but do it in a way that honors them from a freedom perspective,” she says. For participants, that means walking into her sessions and feeling understood, without having to first explain the lens through which they see the world as black women.

“There's a whole bunch of stuff that I don't have to explain. I don't want to have to give this whole historical, social, cultural background,” says Trineka Greer, a public-information officer in higher education who has participated in two of Ms. Davis's intensive workshops.

Over the course of a 30-day workshop, Ms. Greer completed daily exercises, readings and conference calls alongside several other black women who were striving to reach goals that straddled their personal and professional lives. She went into the workshop with the goal of overcoming her impostor syndrome, a psychological challenge often described as feeling inadequate or undeserving of a position or title despite prior accomplishments.

This kind of mentoring and coaching is more marathon than sprint, she says. “It's for people who are looking for more life-changing and transformative strategies, so they don't end up at the end of their career worn out because they're not able to process or handle all of the challenges that we as black women in particular face in the workforce.”

For women who live outside of major cities or don't have time for one-on-one consultations, apps like Building Brave have popped up to provide a digital space for mentoring circles, connecting women across offices and geographies. The second iteration of the app is scheduled to launch in January.

“The more you get away from the urban areas, the less resources that are available,” says Mary Burke, Building Brave's founder.

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