

Blog

Strong women mentors and how they shaped me

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Deciding to embark on a career in Operations wasn't a difficult decision for me. Since starting my first real job as an Emergency Medical Technician, I enjoyed the fast-paced environment, making quick decisions, and making a difference in patients' lives. I was lucky that I was given the chance to advance in the organization and eventually was promoted to a position where I had direct reports for the first time. Unfortunately, I was not the best leader at the start and thought that I knew everything and made decisions without input. I didn't have any mentors at the time who I could run scenarios by or to get constructive feedback to improve my leadership. As a result, I learned some very difficult lessons from my team and changed my leadership style as a result.

As I moved on to a new company, I was able to further refine my leadership style and move into supervisory roles where I could lead the warehouse team from the floor. I transitioned into a servant leadership style. Although I learned a lot, I was still missing perspective on scenarios due to my lack of experience, so I continued to make some mistakes and learn from them. This was until I got to a company where I had my first female boss, Gina. Warehouse Operations tends to be a male dominated field, so having a female boss was a rarity.



Gina not only taught me how to best map locations in a warehouse and perform a physical inventory, but how to do difficult things, such as reporting ethics concerns, being empathetic to employees, and becoming a genuine leader. She was a great sounding board for me to discuss employee challenges. Gina would listen to my challenge, allow me space to talk through my suggested solution, while using her skills and experience to steer me in the right direction when I was going off course. She also provided me with honest and constructive feedback that allowed me to grow into a better leader. Gina made sure to take care of her employees and lead by example. She also provided insight on experiences of being a female leader in a male-dominated industry. Even today, Gina and I still talk and I'm continually in awe of how great of a leader she is.

After working in general warehousing, I moved into the pharmaceutical industry and found another strong mentor who would shape my career. Rachel, who was the Quality leader at the organization, was one of the people on my interview panel. She questioned if and how I would be able to learn extensive pharma regulations to ensure compliance from an operations stand point while still performing my day-job. I don't recall my answer, but I did get the job and then spent the next two months spending every Friday afternoon in her office, asking questions on

the regulations so I could not only have a good understanding of the regulations, but also use this knowledge to train my team. Although I asked her hundreds of questions in those two months, she never made me feel dumb or like I was wasting her time. This is something that I learned to use with my team, especially as I grew in the industry.

Rachel also taught me more about the technical aspects of the industry, allowing me to gain an education in temperature mapping, validation, and how to conduct an audit. But, more important than that, she taught me that respect is earned through action. I always saw Rachel doing the right thing, even when it was difficult. She would take on work to help alleviate the burden on her own team. Rachel would never ask her team to do anything that she personally would not do, and no tasks were below her. If there was a crisis at 2 in the morning, I knew that she would answer the phone and help me navigate the situation or meet me at the site.



Like Gina, Rachel allowed me to use her for advice, not only on the regulations, but how to best handle employee situations, how to motivate teams, and how to bounce back from mistakes. She was my biggest cheerleader when I got into Business School and when I completed my first marathon. Rachel also patiently listened to me complain about the many times that a driver would ask for the “man in charge,” because I couldn’t possibly run the department since I was female.

These two women provided me with a safe space to learn and grow and they both wanted to see me succeed. They also gave me a secure area to fail and understand how to best regroup after a mistake and still motivate a team. As I have grown in my career, I’ve been lucky enough to find myself in a position to mentor others and have used their tactics with me to pay it forward to future leaders. If you are a new leader and do not have a mentor, ask some more experienced people in the industry if they would be willing to be your mentor. Take it from me, without the two strong mentors that I have had, I would not be in the position that I am today.

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