Wine Australia

AUSTRALIAN Grape & Wine

Australian Wine Industry Gender Equity Toolkit

CASE STUDY

Mentoring: creating connections and building relationships

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There's got to be authenticity to the connection.

Mentorship needs to be flexible. Different people need different things. Some have specific goals, and a formalised program provides mentors that can help. Others need flexibility. Mentoring can start as a technical, mutual thing which becomes a conversation and then, when you've got their measure, it can become a more solid arrangement.

My mentees know I'm at the end of the phone. I've said, "I'm comfortable if we don't talk for six months — don't feel like we need to chat, but if you need me reach out. And on the flipside, if I need you, I'll reach out". Sometimes there's freedom in that space as well.

It's gold to have someone say, "no, let's find you something else". People have done it for me, and I know I've done it for others. You say, "I know someone who might have a role that might be better for you". For young women in the industry, when I make those connections I've said, "I need you to keep paying this forward further down the line".

It is valuable when people tell you that you can do it and support you — validating your strengths, backing you with opportunity and supporting your progress.

I have occasionally said 'no' to people who have approached me about mentoring, and sometimes it's because I just feel I can't do what they want. On one hand, you're happy to be approached, but other times you know you need to be saying 'no'. Sometimes the need to say 'no' is to preserve yourself, particularly if you are over committed or out of your depth, and that is ok.

Investing in network building

Spending money and putting energy into taking part in industry events, conferences and local events yields valuable connections.

If you're wondering, "do I pay $1000+ to go to the Australian Wine Industry Technical Conference in Adelaide?", yes, you should, because that's where you build connection. I think people need to recognise that the informal parts of these events are just as valuable as the technical parts.

Putting people in situations to create relationships … that's organic growth. Any connection point is valuable.

On creating connection, whether at physical meetings or online meetings, both are valid. In other environments it can be opportunistic face-to-face moments that prove valuable e.g. people might be at an event or meeting early in the morning or late in the day and someone might hang around and go, "can I just have a chat?" These can be great networking moments and can lead to ongoing mentoring relationships.

Supporting women to grow into senior roles in the industry

Mentoring is ensuring women in senior roles in the industry are supported through new career challenges and goals.

As we move into the back end of our careers, we can also need mentoring, and it's important to find people to help you when you take those big leaps.

There can be a sudden freedom when your work (and oftern personal) life changes and you need to look after yourself. If you have the opportunity for professional growth, you often still need support to get there, to make decisions and to help you work out how to do things that you may not have done for a long time, such as CV preparation and interviews. Then, when you're in a new role, you sometimes need someone to be able to bounce things off. It might be the chair or CEO, or someone outside of your normal circle.