

POWER LADIES
WHO LUNCH,
FROM LEFT:
MEGAN, ANGELA,
VANESSA AND
DANIELLE



WHY YOU NEED A MENTOR

The value of having one shouldn't be underestimated. Here, four high flyers explain how it might be the best thing for your career.

Angela *Have you ever had a mentor?*

Vanessa At the moment I don't have, but I've had both a formal and informal mentor in the past. My formal mentor was a very senior person within the organisation and it was a very structured relationship and our personalities didn't click. It felt a little bit like a lecture; there was a lot of homework and stuff like that. But I've also had a wonderful mentor who unfortunately passed away. He was my boss for a number of years and really an amazing leader and coach; he challenged me and suited my personality. It was perfect because he knew me inside and out. He never told me what to do, it was always directional

guidance, and I think that's what you need in a mentor – it's just someone that you can go to. I think sometimes he didn't say anything in the sessions, but I knew I could just go and talk things through.

Megan I don't think I've had a stereotypical mentor, but I do think I have what people generally refer to as mentors. I've had a number of people in my life that have guided me during my career and probably even before my career started. I think a lot of people probably have mentors that they don't necessarily even think of as one.

Danielle I run a company called PropellHer – it's an online platform that matches

women with career mentors – so I'm in this space. I've had lots of mentors and have an advisory board of six amazing people that are all mentors to me. I also mentor quite a lot through the PropellHer platform and also through the not-for-profit Dress for Success.

Angela I've never had a mentor before, but I have been a mentor to several younger women and they have been very difficult times for me. It's a huge challenge being a mentor – it's not the same as having staff.

Angela *Danielle, tell us a little bit about PropellHer.*

Danielle We wanted to make mentoring accessible to all women. A lot of people

LOOK WHO'S TALKING



ANGELA VITHOULKAS

BUSINESS OWNER/BROADCASTER

(FACILITATOR)

Angela is a small-business owner and keynote speaker. She manages inner-city Sydney business Vivo Café and began online radio station Eagle Waves Radio.



VANESSA NOLAN-WOODS
GENERAL MANAGER,
COMMONWEALTH BANK

Vanessa provides better banking solutions for not-for-profit organisations across Australia, from small community groups to large NGOs. Her business also incorporates all local-government authorities and schools (government and independent).



DANIELLE FLETCHER
CO-FOUNDER, PROPELLHER

Danielle co-founded PropellHer, an online mentor-matchmaking hub for women. PropellHer uses psychometric testing to match women with male and female mentors.



MEGAN O'CONNOR
PRINCIPAL, SLADEN LEGAL

Megan is a principal in Sladen Legal's business law department. She is a member of the Victorian Education Committee for the Taxation Institute of Australia and regularly contributes to the *Taxation Institute of Australia* journal.

wanted a mentor, but didn't know who to ask or were afraid to ask. They didn't know who would be the right fit, but wanted that help and guidance, and we just thought there was an opportunity to bring people who wanted that support and people who were willing to give it together.

I really believe that great things happen when you bring people together. My co-founder and I wouldn't be who we are without the amazing mentors that we had. When we started our business, we began on the journey of personal branding for women and we were speaking to women about what they wanted to do in their careers and building a strong personal brand. Having a mentor just kept coming up. People wanted to talk to someone who's got that experience and who can share it with them. So we pivoted into mentoring and it's been like that ever since. Matching mentors and mentees is the most crucial part of the relationship and that's the problem that a lot of us have: who would be the best mentor for me, how do I ask them to be a mentor, how do I know if it's going to be the right fit. So we've spent a lot of time working on how to really get a great match between mentees and mentors and it came down to personality being the crucial factor in any relationship with a mentor.

Angela *Do you think there's a difference between a coach and a mentor?*

Vanessa Yes, and I look at the analogy of sports. As a coach you need to be there with you a lot, day in and day out. A good coach is there leading you through. As a leader, you should be a coach; it should be a part of your role. If you've got people reporting to you or teams underneath you, you can't be their mentor. A mentor is someone that's out of that domain and that you feel completely comfortable with to share the good and the bad. Everything you need to share with someone that's not going to impact on you personally from a performance point of view.

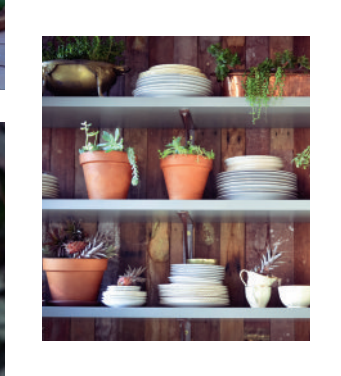
Danielle There's always the scope in any relationship for it to develop in different ways; we train our mentors which we think is the most important part of being a mentor. We train them in some coaching techniques, so coaching for me is more helping people through, questioning them to get to their own answers, their own action plan and keeping themselves accountable. A mentor is about sharing their experience and their thoughts and listening.

Angela *Megan, in your experience, especially in commercial law, a fairly male-dominated area, do you think women wanting a mentor may struggle in asking for one, thinking it could make them appear weak for asking for help?*



Megan It's interesting, because I don't think that would be the perception from men. I've probably got three maybe four men that act in a mentor role for me, yet I haven't necessarily asked them to be my mentor; it just naturally happened. I think if you're just going to someone you don't really know and asking them to be your mentor then maybe you won't get the reaction you're after, but I think if you have a relationship with someone, the right relationship, then I don't think it would have that impact at all. I think it could be a very positive thing.

I'm lucky that I work in an organisation and have people around me that I can go to; whereas I think for women who have started their own businesses it could be quite a lonely road. I think it's really important for them to have a connection or people that they can call upon; it's probably a little



bit easier for us because we work in a corporate environment.

Danielle And I think that's the problem. It's not easy if you don't know the person to then ask them to be your mentor. Within my personal circles, before I started my own business, I didn't know anyone who owned their own business, so who could I ask to be my mentor? I was always going to have to ask someone that I didn't know and it wasn't the fear of asking for help that was the issue; it was more the fear of the rejection.

Vanessa As women, we're a bit harder on ourselves. I grew up in the country and farmers would go to the local produce area at the time of the year they had to spray their crop. They would all stand there and discuss how many litres per acre they're going to put on and what brand they're using this year. It's just a normal thing and they're all across it, they're all talking and they know what Bob down the road has done and what the outlook's going to be; it just comes easily in their conversations. And, I don't know, women need to do more of that I guess.

Angela It's just knowing you're not alone.

Danielle I think that's where networking comes in; and both Business Chicks and (Commonwealth Bank's) Women in Focus program do an awesome job of connecting

"There's always the scope in any relationship for it to *develop in different ways.*"

women to each other. You can meet someone and find out what they're doing and if there's any possible synergies; it's great.

Angela *Do you think the corporate world is getting better structured to mentor women through their careers, enabling them to stay longer in the workforce?*

Megan Definitely, I think firms are getting much better and it's not just law. They're much more flexible in the way they deal with women's different circumstances. I think a lot of law firms put in place programs for mentoring, but I suppose one of the issues with those is they don't necessarily do the matching that Danielle has spoken about. And because of that the relationships don't necessarily work. I'm sure there are times where they do come together and they're a great match, but often they won't.

Angela *Do you think mentor relationships work better formally or informally?*

Megan I think with the informal relationships it's often a two-way street. You find that the mentor and the mentee are both getting something out of it. I think if formal

mentor relationships are based on a great connection, that's good, but I do wonder whether it's enough having just an hour once a month. I think it's a great start, but the beauty of having an informal relationship means you can pick up the phone and have more than one mentor.

Vanessa Women are always juggling lots of balls in life. If you can find somebody who shares the same set of values, you've hit the jackpot, because then you can talk about skills and progress – and work through things from a shared perspective. ✨

{ **ANGELA, VANESSA, MEGAN AND DANIELLE** ARE PREMIUM MEMBERS OF BUSINESS CHICKS. REQUEST THEIR ONLINE BUSINESS CARDS AND CONNECT AT BUSINESSCHICKS.COM.AU.

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