



CRF DIGITAL COMMUNITY EVENT DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND WELLBEING

At a Zoom Interactive Event on 14th October, CRF's **Diversity, Inclusivity, and Wellbeing Community** came together to discuss the barriers women face in securing mentorships, the challenges associated with male-female mentoring relationships, and the personal and organisational rewards of successful mentoring relationships.

Brad Johnson, Professor of Psychology, United States Naval Academy and Faculty Associate, Johns Hopkins University, and **David Smith**, Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, shared insights from their work in this area. This summary shares some of the key insights from the discussion.



OVERVIEW OF MENTORING AND MALE ALLYSHIP WITH BRAD JOHNSON AND DAVID SMITH

The business case for diversity is robust – across industries and professions, greater diversity at all levels in an organisation translates to better decision-making, more innovation and creativity, and higher profits. Yet women are still excluded in a variety of ways, including across recruitment, retention, promotion, and in terms of the gender pay gap.

While most men report that they believe in gender equality, this belief often fails to translate into the actions that will achieve it. Brad and David refer to this as the 'allyship gap' – just because men believe they are doing it, doesn't mean they are actually accomplishing it.

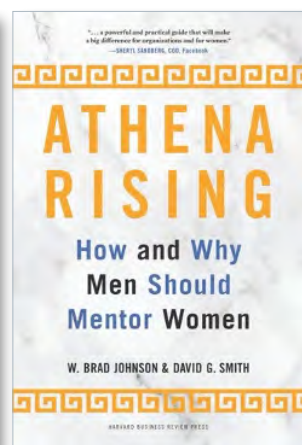
This failure stems from factors such as a lack of understanding or empathy about how women experience the workplace differently (it's difficult to make change if you don't have an awareness of the issues), and uncertainty about what good practice looks like. This state of affairs is troubling because when men are involved in doing the work around equality, it makes a difference.

Brad and David then discussed the different types of allyship, and the reasons that men are reluctant to mentor women.

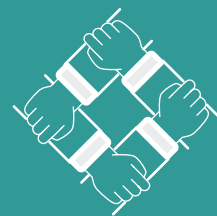
- **Interpersonal allyship** – is the easier part of allyship. It is about how men hold themselves accountable and the kinds of relationships they have.
- **Public allyship** – is more difficult. It involves taking personal risks, putting oneself out there, and holding others accountable. It can be uncomfortable.
- **Systemic allyship** – is about making the systemic changes that will stop patterns of inequality from repeating themselves.

Men can be reluctant to mentor women for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they have anxiety about not knowing what to do, concern about making mistakes, or uneasiness about the potential for gossip or rumours. In the post #MeToo environment, false narratives (such as that women will make false accusations) are making men even more reluctant to mentor. Most of these false narratives are coming from other men; Brad and David point out that would-be mentors and allies should push back against these narratives by asking for the data (which will not be forthcoming).

Brad and David closed their overview by highlighting what good practice looks like across the different types of allyship.



See [Further Reading](#) list for details.



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- **Interpersonal allyship** is most successful when men work on improving their 'GQ' (gender intelligence) through self-education such as reading books and articles on a regular basis. It's about expanding one's knowledge, looking and listening for how women experience the workplace differently, demonstrating humility in order to develop trust for difficult conversations, asking for permission to ask and giving context to those you are trying to learn from, and checking assumptions about women (women are not all the same). Brad and David's research shows that women most appreciate listening skills in their male allies – women sometimes need men to listen to understand, not to 'fix'. Interpersonal allyship also involves developing one's situational awareness. For example, in a meeting, allies should pay attention to who is in the room (and who is not), who the 'experts' are, how people are physically positioned in the room (who is close and who is on the outer ring?), who is doing most of the speaking, whether someone has been dismissed or belittled, who is being ignored, whether ideas are being poached, and so on. It is critical that allies challenge inequalities in situations as and when they see them.
- **Public allyship** is most successful when men have the courage to call out inappropriate behaviour. Brad and David discussed the bystander effect – too often, when a sexist, biased, or harassing comment or joke is made in the workplace, there is silence. Men sit silently rather than engaging or disrupting. It can be useful to follow a 'two-second rule', wherein allies commit to saying something to disrupt the comment very quickly after it happens. This can be as simple as 'I don't appreciate that' and can buy time to collect one's thoughts for a fuller response. When men do disrupt inappropriate behaviour, they should own it – they shouldn't attribute their calling out of the behaviour to other people's discomfort. In addition to disrupting these moments, male allies have a responsibility to hold other men accountable, privately or publicly (depending on context, the egregiousness of the behaviour, etc.). Brad and David call this a 'carefrontation' – wherein men explain to other men why the behaviour is inappropriate. Finally, good public allyship involves public sponsorship. It is not enough to mentor – male mentors need to be their female mentees' raving fan, highlighting their talents and accomplishments to others whenever opportunities present themselves.
- **Systemic allyship** is most successful when accountability is created in employment processes. Leaders need to be comfortable delivering messages around equality, and need to have shared clarity around those messages. Transparency is key – what are we doing and why are we doing it? Trust needs to be built internally with employees and externally with investors and potential future employees. There needs to be accountability at every level for doing inclusion work, and it involves everything from getting the language right in job ads to how hiring committees conduct themselves.

Brad and David emphasised that gender allyship skills are gateway skills – they are transferable to other types of allyship. But, they cautioned, gender allyship starts at home. We will never achieve gender equity in the workplace if men aren't doing their part in the home.



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GROUP DISCUSSION

Following Brad and David's presentation, we shared a group discussion of the issues. The following points emerged.

- Women's networks / resource groups have historically been one of the only safe spaces where women can discuss gender issues in the workplace. Men who enter these spaces cannot show up and try to speak for women or tell them how to do things. They must show humility, listen, and ask how to collaborate and be a more effective ally.
- At the same time, if it's only women getting together to talk about gender equity, it will take 200 years (according to some estimates) to close the gap. Men really do need to get involved, especially men in leadership. Some ways to do this include inviting men to participate in events run by resource groups, and creating spaces for men to help. One organisation has a network for women, but also a 'he for she' ally network. Connecting groups and working together in this way can be powerful and value-adding.
- There needs to be recognition that, while resource groups are great for inclusion and retention, they often produce 'office housework' – it's valuable work, everyone agrees, but in most organisations it is not being valued in terms of compensation.
- Some men can become reticent because they are trying to participate in a way that isn't condescending. It can be useful for men in this situation to take a pause to be more thoughtful about how they respond, but they mustn't miss the opportunity to jump in. Allies should be mindful that they are doing with, not for. The goal is to advance women in order to benefit women, the organisation, and men too. Allyship makes men better leaders, people, partners and parents at home. It's important to recognise that we are all stakeholders in this work.
- There was a general consensus that labelling oneself as an ally can be counterproductive. It can invoke a sense of power and privilege that the ally already has. It's more important to just do the work every day. Furthermore, being an ally to one woman doesn't mean you are one to all women.
- 'Guru' mentors – those who impart their wisdom – are less valuable to women than mentors who make connections, help women broaden their networks, and are humble enough to admit that they don't have all the answers.
- Women-only shortlists can spark controversy and push-back, triggering unhelpful emotional debates. One way to approach this dilemma is to introduce extended shortlists instead. Extended shortlists are effective because there is a network piece to shortlists – people tend to hire within their own networks (which are usually comprised of people who 'look like us'), but extending the shortlist forces one to get outside of their network.
- Other practical approaches to diversity include being more deliberate about applicant pools (where do you look for people / post ads?) and moving from the language of 'quotas' to the language of 'targets' or 'goals'. Male leaders need to be aware that women are sometimes socialised not to put their name forward; they should be vigilant about addressing this. Don't think about 'getting the best person for the job'; instead, ask 'what's holding that best person back from applying?'.
- There was discussion about how allies can empower underrepresented groups without moving into 'saviour/rescuer' mode. Part of this is about men developing awareness and understanding about women's experiences, so that they understand what the barriers – the 'gender headwinds' – are. Next, allies need to ask themselves what they can do to remove a given barrier. In this way, you are helping but not giving something to someone (thus avoiding the 'saviour' role). Some men may also have work to do in overcoming their own socialisation, often in childhood, into the 'rescuer' role.
- Personal connections are one way to build awareness – men often become more aware when an issue affects a woman close to them. For others, there might be a moral angle – it is the right thing to do. For still others it's about the business case or about good leadership. It's helpful to understand a male ally's motivation and work from that.
- When male allies do advocacy work, it's important that they don't expect to get credit for it. They shouldn't be doing it for recognition. Do it for the company and to recognise talent. It is mostly thankless, behind-the-scenes work.
- It is important to reduce and simplify job descriptions to enable women's career progression. Research has established that women are more likely to hold back unless they have all the requirements listed in a job description, while men are more likely to plunge ahead even if they only have a few of the requirements. Job descriptions should be more high-level – about character and strengths than specific, narrow types of experience (which may not fit women's career progression so well anyway). Furthermore, when women do get stuck, male allies can and should advocate for the experiences they need to get onto the path they want to be on.



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- Brad and David noted that most of women's advancement at work happened between the 1960s and 2000. There has been little change since then because, while women left home for work, they retained the lion's share of the 'second shift' (housework and childcare). This has been exacerbated by a third shift during the pandemic (home schooling). So for most women, entering the workforce just means they are now doing twice as much work. This lack of a shift at home has stalled women's progress in the workplace. It is really challenging to be great at both home and work at the same time. Men must do their fair share at home, and heterosexual couples should be supporting each other's careers – after all, most families today are dual-earner families.
- The pandemic has shown a light on how taboo a topic family life is in the workplace. We aren't supposed to take into consideration family life's impact on work. The pandemic provides an opportunity to rethink this. Those organisations that take and integrate the pandemic's lessons about how, where, and when we work are going to attract the best talent because people are looking for this flexibility and balance more than ever now.
- When men are more equitable in their homes, this translates in the workplace. They know how to do the work, and are more practiced at it.
- Great allies don't slink out the door when they are leaving for a family-related reason – they leave loudly. They make it well known that they are leaving and why they are leaving. This role modelling of appropriate behaviour helps to normalise experiences in the workplace. This is very important for junior men, who already have more egalitarian expectations and are looking for senior/older men to give them permission to enact those expectations.

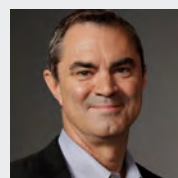
FURTHER READING

CRF. 2020. **Diversity and Inclusion – Emerging Issues.** Briefing Paper. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/briefing-paper-diversity-and-inclusion-emerging-issues>

Johnson, W. Brad and Smith, Dave. 2019. **Athena Rising: How and Why Men Should Mentor Women.** Harvard Business Review Press. <https://store.hbr.org/product/athena-rising-how-and-why-men-should-mentor-women/10378>

Melaku, Tsedale M., Beeman, Angie, Smith, David G. and Johnson, Brad W. December 2020. **Be a Better Ally.** Harvard Business Review Press. <https://hbr.org/2020/11/be-a-better-ally>

Smith, Dave and W. Brad Johnson. 2020. **Good Guys: How Men Can Be Better Allies for Women in the Workplace.** Harvard Business Review Press. <https://store.hbr.org/product/good-guys-how-men-can-be-better-allies-for-women-in-the-workplace/10341>



 RESEARCH

 LINKEDIN

DAVID SMITH PhD, is an author and an Associate Professor at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School. A former Navy pilot, Dr. Smith led diverse organisations of women and men culminating in command of a squadron in combat and flew more than 3,000 hours over 30 years including combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a sociologist trained in military sociology and social psychology, he focuses his research in gender, work, and family issues including gender bias in performance evaluations, dual career families, military families, women in the military, and retention of women.



 RESEARCH

 LINKEDIN

BRAD JOHNSON PhD is Professor of psychology in the Department of Leadership, Ethics and Law at the United States Naval Academy, and a Faculty Associate in the Graduate School of Education at Johns Hopkins University. A clinical psychologist, Dr. Johnson is a mentoring expert specialising in developing gender-inclusive mentoring cultures for organisations around the globe. Dr. Johnson is the author of numerous publications including 14 books, in the areas of mentoring, professional ethics, gender inclusion.