

RETAIL

How retail can foster growth for female leaders

January 14, 2021



Autumn Adeigbo is a female-owned and operated sustainable fashion brand based out of New York. Image credit: NRF

By NORA HOWE

Truthful, transparent and supportive mentorships are crucial to the advocacy and success of women, both in the retail sector and other global industries.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

As women navigate through their careers, many seek out mentors to help them advance and overcome gender barriers in the workplace. During the [National Retail Federation's Big Show](#) digital conference on Jan. 13, industry experts explored what is working and not working in regards to preparing women as leaders in the retail industry.

"When passion meets purpose, you become unstoppable," said Gail Tifford, chief brand officer at [WW International Inc.](#), New York. "I never think that I am working' because what I do is my passion and my calling."

Mentorship in key

Mentorship is an important tool, whether someone is just entering the workforce or is a veteran leader, as it creates an authentic channel for an exchange of values and information.

"With a mentor, it's important to have two things: a personal relationship and close professional ties," said Shannon Gordon, CEO of [theBoardlist](#), Atherton, CA. "The personal relationship is especially important, though, because there has to be a sense of trust between mentors and mentees.

"The best advice I ever received was to be extremely thoughtful about who I work with, and the more I've focused on people, the better choices I have made in my career."



The new reality has forced professionals to network digitally. Image credit: NRF

In a COVID-free world, connecting with individuals at events and conferences, inviting them to lunches and dinners or simply going into an office would be the typical strategies for fostering relationships with professionals. However, as of now, reality is virtual, therefore people must find new ways to make themselves heard.

"Finding a mentor right now is so much more difficult, as you're having to advance yourself in different ways we're not used to," said Karen Beebe, chief information officer at [Vineyard Vines](#), Stamford. "In the virtual world, you really have to strategize ways of getting yourself out there, whether that's connecting with online groups or through friends of friends."

Ms. Gordon and Ms. Tifford agreed on the notion that virtual networking may actually provide a sense of authenticity with emerging relationships due to the vulnerable nature of living room Zoom calls. When speaking virtually, as opposed to in an office or conference room, people are connecting on more personal levels because they are connecting in home environments.

In terms of selecting mentors or mentees, the panelists suggested diversifying one's community, remaining truthful and transparent and recognizing when is the right time to reach out to professionals.



As women navigate the gender barriers of the workforce, they should surround themselves with people who will empower and encourage them to grow professionally. Image credit: NRF

"Due to the personal aspect of mentorship, I often find that I fall towards people who are like me on a fundamental level when seeking a mentor," Ms. Gordon said. "We must be so thoughtful and intentional about building up a diverse community of mentors and mentees because, if we don't, we risk a myopic approach to our industry sectors."

"Learn to recognize and appreciate that you can't possibly know everything all the time, especially as you're just starting out," Ms. Gordon said. "Rather than seeking a mentor for the sake of having a mentor, recognize when you need to learn more about something and let that trigger a conversation naturally."

Advocating for women

While gender equality has not been fully achieved across the world, many brands continue to strive towards inclusivity and advocacy of women in the fashion and retail industry.

Women@Dior, the French fashion house's mentoring program for students from partner schools and parent LVMH, debuted its first online learning platform during the summer of 2020. The new Women Leadership & Sustainability offshoot effort offers students a chance to take classes led by professors from educational institutions such as

Central Saint Martins in London, Bocconi University in Milan and HEC and CentraleSuplec in Paris ([see story](#)).

Outside of fashion and retail, LVMH-owned Champagne brand Veuve Clicquot has partnered with the SISTA collective to create a new program called SISTA x BOLD to extend its efforts to support women entrepreneurs.

The program is dedicated to supporting women entrepreneurs as they recover from the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak and the resultant lockdowns worldwide. Key to the effort is putting women entrepreneurs in touch with 100 mentors offering 1,000 hours of personalized guidance and discussion ([see story](#)).

At the core, the panelists agreed that mentorship is about helping professionals eliminate self doubt, helping to remove any chains that may hold them back and, ultimately, helping them discover their passions and purpose.

"When you love what you do, it's called passion," said Shelley Zalis, host of the panel and CEO of [The Female Quotient](#), Los Angeles. "When you don't, it's called stress."

© 2021 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.