

Career Moves

Mentoring for Women Advancing Their Career and Leadership in Academia

Athena Vongalis-Macrow (Ed.)



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*Mentoring for Women Advancing Their Career and Leadership in
Academia*

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Athena Vongalis-Macrow

Dr Athena Vongalis-Macrow is a Senior Lecturer in Leadership Education at Deakin University, Melbourne Australia. Dr Vongalis-Macrow was awarded her PhD in the field of international education systems. She has drawn on her knowledge of social systems and social change to apply to organizations and leaders. She has over ten years of experience in lecturing and researching about organizations, organizational change, managing learning organizations, leadership and leadership education. Her recent work has focused on organizational analysis and how leadership is constructed by different actors. It extends agency theorizing and sociological analysis of systems and actors and provides the basis of organizational analysis and the sociological issues around leadership inclusive of school leadership. She has a number of academic publications in the field of women and leadership. As a senior lecturer, in her current position, she has conducted research in a number of international contexts including Thailand, Malaysia and China. She is held positions at Monash University, La Trobe University and Deakin University. She is a regular contributor to the Harvard Business Review on women and leadership. Her aim is to make scholarship and research about women in leadership accessible, informative and useful to a wide audience of professionals seeking credible advice and insight about current issues for women in work and in leadership.

Betsy Brown

Dr Betsy E. Brown has served as Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs at North Carolina State University since 2008. She established the Office of Faculty Development at NC State and works with faculty members, department heads and deans on questions related to reappointment, promotion and tenure, oversees the development of employment policies for faculty, and coordinates the nomination and selection processes for a number of state and national professional development programs. She has conducted leadership development programs for a number of institutions including workshops for faculty and department heads as part of NC State's National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant. She previously served as Associate Vice President for Faculty Support and International Programs for the 16-campus University of North Carolina system. She is co-author with Gretchen M. Bataille of *Faculty Career Paths: Multiple Routes to Academic Success and Satisfaction* (2006, ACE Higher Education Series, Greenwood Press). She received her PhD and MA in English from The Ohio State University and BS in English from Appalachian State University.

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Carolyn J. Stefanco is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of History and Women's Studies at Agnes Scott College, a women's college in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. After earning a Ph.D. in History from Duke University, she spent twenty years in the California State University system as a Professor of History, Founding Dean of a College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and in other administrative roles. While Stefanco's scholarship has focused largely on women's experiences in the United States, she has worked to create opportunities for students and faculty from many countries to study and work together. Stefanco was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Zagreb in Croatia, and she has also served as resident director of a London Study program. She speaks regularly about a variety of issues in higher education, and holds positions in several professional organizations.

ATHENA VONGALIS-MACROW

PREFACE

Is there a magic bullet that can create organisational change so that the promises of diversity in leadership can be achieved? Unfortunately, there is no hard and fast way to change organisations or to change the historical construction of leadership. Leadership has traditionally been defined as male, and this definition has been constructed largely in the absence of women. Changing organisational norms is a slow and deliberate process requiring each of us to acknowledge that diversity of leadership is desirable, that different types of leaders can create interesting and innovative workplaces and that leadership is the domain of all types of leaders.

This book considers higher education and leadership from the perspective of women in academia who share in the idea that traditional notions of leadership are out dated and need to change. The sense of urgency is especially relevant considering the flow on effect of having more women working in higher education has not lead to a reciprocal flow of more women in leadership. In most developed countries, less than 25 per cent of women are in leadership positions. The sense of urgency is accelerated when considering that “over half of current college presidents at 61 years of age and older, higher education will face significant turnover in leadership in the near future” (Cassady, 2012). So, the few women that have made it are also getting ready to retire. How can we ensure that up and coming women are progressing towards leadership positions and in doing so, transforming organisations and the diversity of leadership?

This book draws on the substantial knowledge, experience and information of successful women currently working in higher education. However, it is not success identified by women who have made it to the top, rather success is more democratically defined by women who have achieved a level of career progress and are working at progressing to the next level. Their progress is the focus of this book. The aim is to provide the kinds of information and insight that women may seek in order to continue to progress their career goals, perhaps leading towards leadership. What is needed and what would make the journey easier is if women could access and act upon the strategic advice and learnings from a concerned mentor imparting words of wisdom and strategic insight about what it means to build a career and move towards leadership in higher education.

Initially the book was prompted by an intensive conference at Oxford University which focused on women in higher education. The conference attracted over forty women from across the globe, working in different disciplines within higher

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education, all of whom outlined their experiences of leadership issues for women, in their respective countries. Each presenter drew on research and their experience to outline the ongoing issues that face new, middle and senior academic women as they negotiate their careers within higher education. The presentations revealed the issues confronting female academics in higher education are common to many women from across the globe. Perhaps the nature and intensity of the problems faced by women are different, but the principles underpinning the problems remained a constant. Women felt left out of leadership, they experienced discrimination and setbacks, they felt unsupported and experienced isolation. A common theme centred on the contention that the culture of academia and higher education leadership was imprinted with models of leadership, as a male construct. The conference did engage in a critical analysis of gendered leadership and the impact on female academics, drawing upon the works of many scholars who have unpacked this phenomenon eloquently, passionately and rigorously. Scholars like Blackmore, Sachs, White, and Middleton, to name a few, have raised awareness and have significant impact in showing that lack of women in leadership creates divisive and inequitable organisations that perpetuate the exclusion of women. They have highlighted the constrictive and hierarchical structure of higher education institutions systematically inhibit women from progressing to executive and academic leadership.

The book acknowledges the work of these scholars by building on their significant contributions that lay the foundational context for women working in higher education. The book extends the thesis about why women are locked out of leadership, to focus on what can be done. While the participants at the conference drew on gendered research to frame our arguments and experiences, we found ourselves out of time to discuss the most important reason for why we came together. We did not converge on Oxford to have a pity party or share our common woes; we came to share, learn from each other and to see what could be done. To this end, the book is an extension of some of the ideas and subsequent discussions that sought strategies to inspire and motivate women to forge ahead with their academic career. Each contributor has been asked to offer her best strategic advice to inspire others to strive for leadership and overcome the barriers and obstacles.

The book intersects with a key idea for progressing women in leadership, namely mentoring. The need for mentoring and career guidance has been identified in women's leadership research and literature as a missing ingredient in women's career planning. For example, Sabattini (2011) states,

European participants said that they wished they had spent more time finding mentors, building networks, and showcasing their work from the very beginning of their career. Many also wished to have participated in career coaching" (Sabattini, 2011, p.6).

Mentoring is also recommended by much of the literature and research underpinning women in leadership (Peterson et al, 2012, Grant, 2012, Madsen, 2012).

Women are in need of information and advice from those who know and are in the know. However, we know that finding the right mentor is difficult. Like finding the right psychologist, there has to be some kind of fit. Traditionally mentoring meant a senior staff member assisting a more junior member with their career. This relationship was often a transaction, a trade off, part of the senior staff performance obligations. How useful could it be? Ehrlich, Hansford and Tennet (2004) remind us that this kind of mentoring is one-way, unequal and considers learning as something that can be transmitted from senior to junior staff. For many women, this is their experience of mentoring, that is, as a very disempowering process in which the junior member's deficits are identified and instructions of how to fix these deficits are given. This book intends to show otherwise, that mentoring can help you develop, can help you learn and can help you share in the knowledge and power that the contributors have gained in their experiences. The aim is to benefit from the experiences of the contributors.

Mentoring is conceptualised differently by each contributor, but at the core of mentoring practice, is the focus on learning, power sharing, inclusivity, participatory actions and democratic engagements. The work of Chesler and Chesler (2002) discussing the mentoring of female engineering students in the male dominated field, shapes the principles of successful mentoring, that it empowers women by insisting they shape and participate in the kinds of mentoring they need. They stress the need for diverse mentors across the different career stages and to meet the very specific needs of diversity amongst women. Without a specific and targeted mentoring that meets the needs of women, the presence of a bad mentor can be hindrance to many high achieving women (Tolar, 2012).

The contributors in this collection are focussed on giving women experiential, scholarly and personal insight into what it takes to build and establish an academic career. The aim is not to use the book as a substitute for finding a good mentor, but to get a jump start on gaining insight about academia and how to shape your career. It is hoped that this book will fill the gap for the majority of women for whom finding the right mentor is a challenge by providing the kind of insider knowledge and information that may come from a mentor in order to provide critical and often 'hidden' advice about their career and career moves. As stated most eloquently by Spencer (2012),

With only 2.8% of women CEO's in the top 1000 companies we aren't moving forward, we are moving backward. Our strategies to get to the top aren't working. It is incumbent upon us "old broads" to advise younger women what works and what doesn't so that women will have a greater voice. Using our communication talents to the fullest in a positive way can foment change and change is long overdue.

Each chapter offers strategic advice for women by contributors acting as 'mentors' who reflect, discuss and offer critical learnings to the readers. A key success strategy in the negotiation of leadership aspirations is the necessity of a mentor to help guide

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and shape career moves. In the series of chapters, each uniquely addresses the issue of women in higher education relevant to the different stages of an academic career. Each stage needs specific advice, for example,

...older women were sensitive to the subtle homosocial culture, attitudes and norms in the university, while the younger women relied more on a meritocratic approach to their careers, and were seemingly less aware of the institutional gendered power relations. (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000, p. 7)

Providing timely and helpful advice is dependent on the identity, location and career stages of female academics. For this reason, the mentor contributors to the collection of chapters range from University presidents to beginning academics juggling PhDs and teaching. In all cases, the chapters will draw on ways to address common issues that arise for women working in higher education at particular stages of their career. For example, while appearing self-confident, younger academics assume that equality has been achieved. In the 'post-feminist' era they expect material support systems such as childcare to be well established. However, contributors will discuss their experiences in accessing these services and the hidden implications of managing motherhood and career. Recent reports (Guardian, 2012) show that only 12% of female PhD pursued careers in higher education. Citing impediments, unappealing careers and sacrifices as key reasons for resisting higher education careers. This book addresses such concerns by tapping into the experience and knowledge of others who have experienced or have devised ways to help women negotiate and deal with organisational and personal obstacles. The book also addresses issues for women in the middle of their careers as they work to build track record, multi task and negotiate the personal and professional demands. Mid-career women face a number of challenges to keep their career on track while they work their way towards promotion. There are cultural, social and economic barriers that impact on women's academic life and progress and the book will address some of these through the research and experience of the authors as they faced their specific challenges in building careers. For women who have reached executive levels, they are also faced with unique set of issues. While most experienced academics have organised their family lives around their careers, they nevertheless talk of organizational obstacles, gendered organisations that present unique challenges to female academics 'at the top'.

Career Moves: Mentoring for Women Advancing their Career and Leadership in Academia is an international collection of book chapters that explore a range of specific issues that all women in higher education face or will face as they move up the career ladder. The book follows a career trajectory from new academics, middle academics and senior academics, in order to provide specific mentoring advice that will be useful, practical and essential for all women contemplating a career in higher education.

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