



Sixth Edition | 2023
International Women's Day
Digital Toolkit

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1.1 | EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the International Women's Day edition of the Women@PlayStation Digital Toolkit. This issue is a special one, as it not only celebrates the women of Sony Interactive Entertainment but provides an opportunity for us to learn from each other and ultimately thrive together.

The topic of this issue follows the trend of professional development, but instead of looking at another industry to take inspiration and advice from, we've looked to ourselves.

Our contributors from across Women@Playstation EMEA and NA have provided insights into their experiences as women working in tech. With them we explore the importance of making connections with other women and allies, the power of good mentorship and how we can all be a bit better at celebrating our own wins. We also sit down with Liz Arredondo to learn more about her experiences as a woman writing for both TV and AI.

But first, we explore this year's International Women's Day theme—#EmbracingEquity. Read on to learn a bit more about what equity is, how it differs from equality and what #EmbracingEquity means to Sony Interactive.

We hope you enjoy this issue and find some useful actionable takeaways. Its purpose is to help provide you with a moment of pause to think about ways in which you might want to develop professionally, and equip you with some ideas and tools to get started.

To our readers—thank you for spending your valuable time with us. And to our contributors, this wouldn't be possible without you!

Thanks,
The Women@PlayStation Team



1.2 | EMBRACING EQUITY — INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY 2023

2023’s International Women’s Day theme is “Embrace Equity.” Its goal is to create an inclusive world by encouraging everyone to support and “embrace” equity within their own spheres of influence. Challenging our stereotypes and bias, calling out discrimination, and fostering inclusion are all ways we can encourage equity.

What is Equity?

The words equity and equality are often used interchangeably but have key differences.

To quote the International Women’s Day organizers directly:

Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities.

Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances, and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.



Women and other underrepresented groups need us to improve equity for meaningful progress, as often an equality approach doesn't provide enough support to those who are marginalized to begin with. The image on the right gives an illustration of the differences between equality and equity.

Equality assumes the same measures will allow everyone equal opportunities—which isn't always the case. Equity provides equal access by adjusting the tools to be more suitable to specific circumstances.

This year's International Women's Day theme aims to educate and encourage embracing equity, so we can all have clear view of the opportunities ahead.



Embracing Equity at Sony Interactive Entertainment

Equity is about removing barriers and obstacles for underrepresented groups, so we level the playing field and create equal access for everyone. Our focus now is to define and measure what it really means to have "equity." We cannot simply state that it implies having a particular number of people from a given demographic represented equally at all levels,

because the gaming industry does not necessarily have the pipeline of talent for every demographic group in that way. As a result, we must better understand and define what it means to have equity for all groups within the gaming industry. So that is where we are beginning our journey towards improving equity at Sony Interactive Entertainment.

Tiffany Johnson—Global Head of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Social Justice Initiative, Sony Interactive Entertainment

SECTION 2.

MAKING CONNECTIONS AND FINDING ALLIES AROUND YOU

It's intrinsically human to need a support network to succeed. The same applies to our professional lives but can be quite difficult when we're all across different continents and behind screens. For women, this comes in the form of other women and male allies. This next section explores the importance of engaging others and working with allies to thrive.



2.1 | FOCUS ON THE PERSON BEHIND THE PROFILE: TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH YOUR TEAM IN A FULLY REMOTE ENVIRONMENT

BY: JESSICA LONG – SENIOR ENVIRONMENT OUTSOURCE REVIEW ARTIST

Starting a new job in the tech field in April 2020 was a new adventure for me in many ways. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced a complete industry shift to convert offices and studios to a remote setup; this completely dismantled and separated teams of all sizes into thousands of individual pieces in different settings.

While the shift to remote work has become a permanent change for many teams, making setup, onboarding, and training a nearly seamless process, the stark difference from the “old way” continues to be a challenge in terms of team member relationships and morale. Making personal connections that matter to people is no longer as simple as meeting folks in a break room who happen to share one’s interests or hobbies.

While working in office or on location, workplace connections often form organically, the result of shared physical space and conversations. In the absence of physical proximity, the non-work-related chat opportunities disappear. I personally felt incredibly isolated for a long time, unsure of how to forge meaningful connections, feeling adrift without social support or engagement.

I have worked to find new ways to create connections in a remote work environment, and though the process is ever-evolving, I have noticed some themes that we as leaders and future leaders must keep in mind to help build our teams’ morale and success.



1. PROACTIVELY SUPPORT

New team members, especially in junior or associate roles, often face a steep learning curve in our industry. They may struggle with self doubt, uncertainty, or fear of being wrong—perhaps normal feelings for a new job, but in a remote environment, senior personnel and leadership aren't afforded the usual opportunities for spontaneous support or temperature checks with new team members. It becomes critical to vocally support our teams much more than feels "normal"—calling out their successes loudly, especially on calls with other members of the team. Don't hesitate to single a person out for positive reinforcement—especially if you pick up on them putting themselves down.

2. INTENTIONALLY ENGAGE

Though it can be uncomfortable at first, we have to purposefully reach out to others and initiate dialogue. Generally we use industry news or updates to start conversations, but the key is to not let them fizzle out; asking for opinions or thoughts is a great approach for igniting engagement. Actively following up with someone works wonders for making teammates feel involved, appreciated, and needed.

3. CREATE A FUN AND SAFE SPACE.

Perhaps one of the most important ways to engage with your team in a remote environment, is creating a "just for fun" or "non-work-related" space where team members can chat informally. For my team, this started as a Teams Meeting (sigh!) every other Friday where a few people had virtual lunch together; it has grown into a department-wide monthly gathering with games, personal portfolio shows, pet biographies, and even an "advice corner." Every one of these is full of laughter, smiles, and fast paced interactions.

Connecting with our teams on a personal level, in an intentional way, is absolutely critical for this new world of work we exist in. As they say, a little goes a long way, and trying some of these ideas will almost certainly show noticeable positive returns immediately!

2.2 | WHAT TO CONSIDER AS AN ALLY MANAGING WOMEN

BY: CHRISTOPHER HORNER – PROJECT MANAGEMENT, PLAYSTATION STUDIOS BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

In researching this article, I began by asking female colleagues, family and friends how a male manager can, as an ally, encourage a 'perfect' (male) manager to (female) employee relationship. Many spoke highly of their managers, but it was difficult to pin down exactly what worked, when the positive examples they had were simply that of a harmonious employer and employee relationship, regardless of gender. So I altered my approach, and instead requested instances where the relationship had not lived up to that ideal, and I hope that sharing these will provide opportunity for male managers to reflect.

Consider the tasks you are assigning your employees

A friend describes one manager who admitted allocating tasks based on gender: "anything that required detail and more time he gave to us females but when he 'just wants to get something done' he'll give it to the male colleagues". Certainly an extreme example but one that can be learnt from; when assigning work, try to be mindful of exhibiting unconscious bias and evaluate colleagues on an individual basis. Other accounts describe women disproportionately being asked to get involved in coaching, change management and administration (organising birthday cards, booking meeting rooms etc.). Clearly these activities are found within many job descriptions, but in the context of an ad hoc task, be mindful if there is some avoidable trend to who you ask to do what.

Consider the behaviours some women might be more likely to exhibit

Underplaying seniority. One example I received was of a friend, having found herself in a more senior position, introduced herself as 'Interim Director' in a meeting; it was only later that she realised that this both undermined her authority, and was not an action taken by male colleagues.

Failing to self-promote. A colleague, who was significantly outperforming her peers, became frustrated that her efforts were not recognised by management. Soon she realised that she simply was not on their radar and needed to speak up.





Apologising. It is unfortunate but true that the perception of those in leadership positions is not linked with a tendency to apologise. The ultimate goal for society is for this not to be the case, but until then, consider the habits of your female employees; why are they saying sorry, is it for a misdeed or is it a learned trait in uncomfortable situations? As an ally and manager, you can encourage those women to be proud of the roles they have earned and deserve.

Consider the environment you are creating in your team

What is the culture of your team? Every team is different, but some (primarily male-heavy) teams harbour a 'laddy' environment, exaggerated in *The Wolf of Wall Street* and other sales-orientated dramatisations. Nicknames, in-jokes, banter. The perception may be that this has a cohesive effect, and generates a bond between team members, but invariably it also excludes people, not just the women on your team. When encouraging team bonding, look for activities that are as engaging for women as they might be for men.

More directly, be aware of affinity bias when dealing with members of your team. This is a tendency "to connect with others who share similar interests, experiences and backgrounds" and, in the context of a male manager, can manifest itself in an aura of favouritism. A colleague shared an example where someone she worked with felt like her de facto manager because of this, even though he was the same seniority level as her.

Research shows that women are 20% less likely to receive actionable feedback at work; an account from a male colleague admits that he was "scared to say where she... needed to improve as I was concerned about the response I may get". As a manager, be specific with your feedback—vague comments may give your employee the impression that she is generally performing well / on the 'right track', but without tangible, documented business accomplishments or goals, women are at a subtle disadvantage for promotion.

Consider the attendees of your meeting

This is a point for allyship in general but, as a manager, you may be more likely to initiate meetings / projects / working groups. What is the representation like in these groups—will there be a varied range of voices? This can apply when in the discussions also—are female voices being heard, is there a way that you can make space for them? Use the agenda and the role of chair to bring everyone in.

Consider pay

There is a pay gap. Women are paid less than men. To say that this issue completely falls outside the purview of a manager smacks of relinquished responsibility. When filling an open role, a job is advertised, the best candidate selected and then they may be asked their salary history and expectations. According to The Fawcett Society, a UK women’s rights charity, “over a third of people lie” when asked about their previous salary, with men more likely to do so than women (60% vs 25%)”. Putting the onus on the candidate to negotiate salary has the potential of keeping those who are currently underpaid to remain as such; advertising the salary range of an open role removes that risk.

While I acknowledge that a lot of the mentioned steps are owned by recruitment, as a manager you can push for a better approach.

Consider mentoring a woman

We tend to lean naturally towards helping those that remind us of a younger version of ourselves, which, in an industry whose leadership positions are dominated by men, contributes to why we are still not seeing enough women advancing into leadership positions. Consciously choosing to mentor a woman is a great way to start to break this cycle; there are some tips on LinkedIn Learning around how to approach this in a way so that all parties feel comfortable and safe.

In conclusion, the office environment is improving, and thankfully, ‘overt’ discrimination is becoming less common. What can be focussed on is being mindful of the dynamics you are promoting in your team. As a male manager of women, there is an authoritative set-up that has the potential to compound gender inequality; consider your approach.

REFERENCES

[Unconscious Bias: 16 Examples and How to Avoid Them in the Workplace](#)

[Women in the Workplace](#)

[Research: Vague Feedback Is Holding Women Back](#)

[End Salary History](#)

[Show The Salary](#)



2.3 | THE POWER OF MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER WOMEN

BY: ELLEN JAMES – PRODUCT OWNER, CUSTOMER AND CONTENT ENGINEERING

Research by Harvard Business Review shows that women who have a network of close female colleagues are more likely to experience professional success. [A Forbes article](#) on this topic concludes the research perfectly: “Women trying to rise up into leadership face cultural and systemic hurdles that make it harder for them to advance, such as unconscious bias. The study suggests that a way to overcome some of these hurdles is to form close connections with other women, who can share experiences from women who have been there, done that—from how to ask for what you’re worth to bringing your unique talents to leadership.”

The pandemic has changed the ways we work – in both positive and negative ways. [A UK work study](#) found that less than half of women have managed to make friends at work during the pandemic, “the data showed that 43% of women are missing socialising over lunch the most, compared to just 26% of men.” Furthermore, women are “54% more likely to talk about mental health” with their work colleagues than their male counterparts. However, [with women generally favouring flexible working](#) – due to the numerous benefits, this means it’s important that we explore other avenues of connecting with each other.

[Lean In published an insightful article](#) on how women can champion other women in the workplace. Including celebrating each other’s successes – call each other out and make sure our efforts are known. Encouraging each other to go for that promotion, take that new opportunity. And mentoring other women and sharing experiences.

Having spent my whole career in male-dominated industries, I often overlooked and even negated the impact of connections with other women. However, when I started to work alongside a new female manager my perspective completely changed. I gained both a mentor and a friend. She advocated for me in situations where I didn’t feel comfortable doing it myself. One particular instance always stays in my mind; during an important presentation a colleague started to speak over me and take over the conversation – she called this out. That small gesture meant a lot – professionally, I was able to finish presenting the key information and personally, I had found an ally.

Having recently joined Sony Interactive Entertainment I was thrilled to see the Women@PlayStation network and how well established it is, adding true value and insight. I’m really excited to be on board and get involved going forwards.



2.4 | HOW I SURVIVED AN ONLINE MBA DURING PANDEMIC, WHILE WORKING FULL-TIME AND PARENTING 3 KIDS

BY: PJ CAMP MALIK – SENIOR MANAGER OF PRODUCT DATA SCIENCE, GAME PF ENGAGEMENT

I had an illogical desire to get an MBA during the pandemic. When my kids started doing at-home schooling, I figured ‘mom can do it too’. It seemed absurd to me at the time because I was a gray-haired professional with focus issues, who hadn’t been in a classroom for what seemed like 100 years.

I talked to colleagues at Sony Interactive Entertainment, and rather than kindly tap me on the shoulder with a ‘that’s nice’, they offered to write recommendation letters. I figured it was a shot in the dark to get admitted, having less than stellar performance as an undergraduate student. (I was too busy socializing to focus on organic chemistry). Surprisingly to me, the University of Illinois was delighted to welcome me to its Summer 2020 cohort.

Since I’m 103 years old (according to my kids, and don’t I look amazing for my age?), I had to seek advice from my brilliant Sony Interactive 2020 Summer intern about how to be a student. “Go get involved. Make friends. Find people like you so you can share the journey together. Don’t try to be a hero and do it alone. Business school is a group project.” I gotta say, that was absolutely the best advice I got hands down.

I found my people at school. We formed a Discord group. They became my asynchronous cohort, that I affectionately call my “Discord bros”. To which it’s still delightful to hear “YOU’RE on Discord??!!”. It’s also become the primary place I speak to my thirteen-year-old—“Please come to dinner now...”

After spending probably too long in a camp of ‘I can do this by myself, asking for help is weak’, I was delightfully proven wrong. Business school is all about collaboration, negotiation, and intentionally working together. My cohort all rose together with new skills, new tools, and new ways to work. Never in a million years would I have figured people really do want you to succeed. Your colleagues and leadership are equally delighted to see you champion new adventures.





My kids watched mom take live lectures, do homework, record video presentations, and show up for her classes when she promised. I negotiated with my eldest that 'if I can pass accounting, you can do your homework'. Of course, they thanked me with a joke from the movie Napoleon Dynamite... "your MOM goes to college". Yes. I did.

I love challenging stereotypes. It's a hobby of mine. So this MBA is for the parents and for anyone else who is 103 years old and thinks they might be too old to learn new things. Sony Interactive has taught me to get involved, ask for help and encourage others. If this mom of 3 can pass accounting, so can you. Me and Sony Interactive Entertainment will be right here to cheer you on.

SECTION 3.

SITTING DOWN WITH LIZ ARREDONDO ON TV WRITING AND AI



3 | SITTING DOWN WITH LIZ ARREDONDO ON TV WRITING AND AI

INTERVIEWED BY KATIE MONTGOMERY – SENIOR ACCOUNT MANAGER, GLOBAL MARKETING

Elizabeth Arredondo, a writer focused on creating compelling characters for television and interactive mediums covers her real-world experiences developing and user-testing the personality and conversations for a robot wellness coach, including how she leverages her background as a television writer. We sat down with her to talk about her experiences as a woman in tech.

1. Please tell us a little bit about your background and how you got involved with Sony Interactive Entertainment.

My background is primarily in TV writing. I have an MFA from USC’s Writing for Screen and TV program and have worked on network and streaming shows, along with original pilots. But when I moved to the Bay area for my husband’s startup company, I discovered a robotics startup looking for a screenwriter to create the personality and conversation style for their new healthcare robot, Mabu. I spent the next three years developing Mabu’s personality and user interactions. I was out of my comfort zone but I found the work fascinating. I was invited to join mediaX at Stanford as a Visiting Scholar. I developed a seminar series called *Creating AI Conversations* that brought professionals working to create personality and voice in AI together with academic researchers at Stanford. Martha Russell, the Director of mediaX, introduced me to someone from the Future Technology Group within Engineering at Sony Interactive Entertainment, who then invited me to give a talk called *Giving Robots a Life, Designing Personality, Backstory, and Interactions for AI Assistants*.

2. What are the differences in writing for a robot vs the screen?

It’s always exciting to see characters come to life, but watching Mabu interact with people in the real world was wild. To be able to actually ask people how they felt about her was creatively exciting. Watching Mabu help people was very rewarding. Creating character and dialogue for a “real world” agent that is meant to interact with people in real life raised unique design challenges, including creating trust, balancing engagement with getting work done, and keeping people interested in interactions over a longer term.





3. What are your thoughts on how AI can be used in or benefit our daily lives (personally and/or professionally)?

I think AI has the potential to bring a lot of benefit. Mabu has a very specific job: to talk to chronically ill people about taking their medications and inspire positive behavior change. We use AI in these targeted, specific ways in our personal lives all the time—getting driving directions, asking home speakers about the weather or for song recommendations, nutritional coaching apps, and so on. I think we are just starting to see how AI can be used in creative professions. It will be interesting to see how that evolves, especially with the advent of large language models like chatGPT.

4. There are a lot of protests going on in the creative world against AI-generated content with some websites banning it altogether. Do you have any thoughts on how AI-generated content can affect people in the industry?

I believe AI can assist, but not replace human creativity. Creating art, characters and narratives is at the core of what makes us human. We need to be careful to preserve this. I do think there are exciting partnerships that we can form with AI technology that may let us achieve creative heights that were not possible before. A question that inspires me is, how can we use AI to create richer worlds than we could before? What did I once only dream of doing that now might be possible by leveraging AI technology?

5. What has your experience as a woman in both creative and technical fields been like? What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

In both the TV and tech worlds, I've had the experience of looking around the room and noticing I was one of the only women there. One challenge can be finding yourself with a different point of view from the rest of a team. I've found that times when I've listened, and taken the time to understand how my point of view is different and why, then spoken from a place of honesty and authenticity, people have generally been receptive. Sometimes these conversations lead to important pivots in strategy. When I started to have more confidence and embraced what made me different, especially as a creative person in tech, I found it was actually an asset. If you find yourself in a similar situation, my advice would be to look at what makes you feel vulnerable or insecure... is that actually something that you can lean into? Can you look at this as something that makes your point of view more valuable? Chances are that you can use your experience to offer important insights and make your work and position stronger.

SECTION 4.

ACTIONABLE TIPS AND WORKING LIFE ADVICE

Our contributors shared a bit about their own personal experiences, providing advice and guidance on how they manage certain challenges of working life.





4.1 | SELF-PROMOTION AS SEEN THROUGH A CULTURAL LENS

BY: RITU GUPTA – PRINCIPLE HARDWARE ARCHITECT, HARDWARE AND SYSTEMS ENGINEERING

My brother and I grew up in India in a family of academics. Both of us were everything that a parent could ask in their kids. We were good at our studies, in sports and extra-curricular activities. Despite this success, as is common in Asian countries, “downplaying your skills and talents” is a way to appear humble. My mom was always very involved in our school activities—especially the extra curriculars—and would always say “results speak for themselves, you don’t need to brag about those”.

I was a good student academically, a state-level table tennis player, and I have stacks of winning certificates from my school years from pretty much every extra-curricular activity I took part in. But talking about these successes is difficult.

Both my brother and I went to one of the best engineering colleges in India, moved to the US for our graduate degrees and now work here. Understanding the corporate culture of the US has been a learning experience, especially as it is perhaps the most bullish nation when it comes to personal branding and self-promotion. Despite my success up until moving to the US, adjusting to the culture required some work. Self-promotion still always triggers the voice in my head—“you are bragging and being a jerk”—but I have learnt and used the following tools to better navigate the cultural differences:

First Impressions: In my last company, most of senior leaders I worked with had been with the company for decade(s). In my first 1:1 with a new key stakeholder, as a part of introducing myself, I would briefly go over my work experience. This helped me build credibility.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

In my last company, most of senior leaders I worked with had been with the company for decade(s). In my first 1:1 with a new key stakeholder, as a part of introducing myself, I would briefly go over my work experience. This helped me build credibility. It helped the other person understand my strengths, capabilities which I bring to the assignment and areas where I might need help – and provides a personal confidence boost



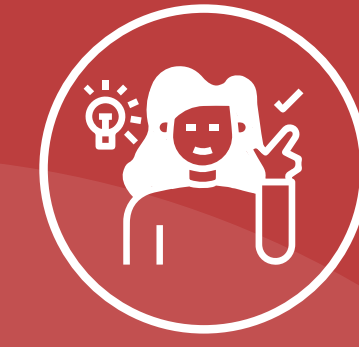
SHARE LEARNINGS

Self-Promotion works when it is natural and unforced. Sharing learnings from a past or present assignment at a relevant point in a discussion or using a blog/documentation is a great tool. If these learnings can be weaved in as stories, they will stick with audience for a long time!



SHARE SUCCESS

Be very generous with giving credit to colleagues wherever due. This helps build a sense of camaraderie which always comes back.



BE ASSERTIVE

One of my former managers emphasized on 'being assertive'. Assertiveness means being able to express effectively and standing up for my point of view as well as respecting views of others. In technical discussions, by being assertive, I have been able to successfully establish my technical competence and leadership abilities.

Working through cultural differences is an exercise not just for women but also for men. I see my brother working on the same challenges, making efforts to understand the cultural difference of self-promotion (American) vs humility (Asian) as well. I feel that it is certainly much easier for men compared to women, given the additional pressures we face and the prevalence of imposter syndrome making it even more difficult to talk about our personal successes.

When it comes to navigating work culture I am constantly learning. However, even after spending many years in US work culture developing and applying these learnings, the voice in my head is always a critique. While I write this, the voice is berating me – “you have bragged so much about your life to write this article. You didn’t need to write this article”. I would like to befriend this voice and I would advise anyone reading this to befriend their inner critic too – shout about your successes, you worked hard to achieve them and deserve to be celebrated.



4.2 | PIVOTING TO A CAREER IN GAMING: HOW I MANAGED IMPOSTER SYNDROME AND TRUSTED MYSELF

BY: BRIANNA KREJCI – FINANCE AND PLANNING ANALYST, PLAYSTATION STUDIOS PRODUCT PORTFOLIO

Despite having played games for years, I never considered myself a “gamer”. Gamers, to me, were people who played “serious” games where you killed zombies and shot the enemy team. I thought that my love of Animal Crossing, The Sims, and Candy Crush didn’t count—those were children’s games. More insidiously, those were “girl games”. Embedded in me was the belief that to be a gamer, you had to love shooters and fighting games. You had to be a boy. I wouldn’t have said it out loud, but over the last year I came to realize that I held this as a subconscious truth.

I didn’t own a non-Nintendo console until I bought a PS5 in 2021. I had begun my career pivot through my MBA program and saw that the opportunities in film and television that I came to school for were stagnant, but that gaming was electric and evolving. I started to read, listen, and ask questions about the gaming industry whenever I could. I learned about cloud gaming, what AAA means, and which games changed the industry. I learned about the major publishers and studios. When recruiting started, I decided to unconfidently throw my name in the ring. I mean, who was I?

When I got an interview at Sony Interactive Entertainment, I was sure they made a mistake. I was in way over my head for that first interview. Getting rejected would crush my spirits and confirm my belief that I don’t belong to this community. But then, by some miracle, I was asked to interview for another role. I was determined. I was inspired by my interview experience and looked into more PlayStation titles. I was drawn to Aloy as a protagonist. So, I started playing Horizon: Zero Dawn on easy (while embarrassed to admit the difficulty I was playing on). I loved it. I loved Aloy.

Something in that second interview clicked, and I knew I had found my home. Despite still facing imposter syndrome, I try to remind myself that the gaming industry cannot only employ people who have been playing “hardcore” games their entire lives. It needs fresh perspectives to continue growing for diverse audiences and creating inclusive shared experiences.

Now, I openly talk about playing games on Easy. I don't have the innate reaction times that many do, or the love of failing 100 times to finally get it on the 101st I know I am not alone. I talk to many women about gaming, and many say the same thing: "I want to play games, but they're just too hard." I firmly believe that unless difficulty is the feature, this should never happen. Games, even those with combat, are so much more than their combat. They're immersive worlds with deep stories to tell and secrets to explore. No one should be barred because they can't shoot arrows fast enough. It was shortly before my Sony Interactive interviews that I learned about the existence of difficulty adjustments, and I make sure I share this news with as many women as I can.

I know I have a lot to learn. I'll forget who published Borderlands, and ask "wait, remind me what Warren Spector made again?" But I'm not afraid to ask. In fact, I'm excited to ask. I'm thrilled that I can see so many games for the first time and share my thoughts as a newcomer. I openly talk about how the combat mechanics in Marvel's Spider-Man are too difficult for me but how I put 85 hours into Horizon Zero Dawn. I talk about what I love in mobile games, which support I main in Wild Rift, the brilliant storytelling sandbox of The Sims, and where beloved games lose me (it's almost always too much combat). Most importantly, I don't shy away from my commitment to bringing more women and people like me to embrace their role in the gaming community, even if they "only" play Stardew Valley.



SECTION 5.

MENTORSHIP

Mentorship is incredibly valuable both professionally and personally. The following articles share personal experiences of mentorship — both from a mentor and mentee perspective — and provide advice on how to make the most of your relationships.



5.1 | MENTORSHIP MATTERS, BUT SPONSORSHIP AND ADVOCACY OPEN DOORS

BY: ELLA FORTUNA – DIRECTOR PRODUCT MARKETING, PLATFORM INNOVATION AND BRAND STRATEGY

Some time ago I found myself working with a new-to-me team. And not just new to working together, but NEW-NEW, as in I didn't know a single person in this business organization.

Looking back, I remember feeling so excited about the opportunity to forge a new working partnership, but I struggled with looming deadlines. At first, things were just slow. We were still feeling each other out and trying to learn each other's expectations. It was going well, but we weren't efficient. That kind of working relationship comes with trust and rapport built over time. Then, a month or so into things, things just sped up overnight. All of the sudden our work together felt faster and more in sync.

So, what happened? Was it my sparkling personality, deep product marketing knowledge, and endless optimistic Star Trek quotes?! All that may have helped, but it wasn't the catalyst. What I didn't realize was that someone was working on my behalf... my mentor.

Hopefully, we all know of and participate in one of Sony Interactive's many mentorship programs, whether through Women@PlayStation or your business unit, so I won't utilize my limited character count with a lengthy definition. Typically, mentorship is about advice, guidance, and support, but Advocacy and Sponsorship are different types of business relationship, ones that we should all know more about.

Though I didn't fully grasp this at the time, but my Mentor was going beyond. Way beyond. He was advocating for me. Advocacy and Sponsorship are when someone goes out of their way to invest in you, to share about your work, to advertise your passion. Advocates and Sponsors say your name to their peers and colleagues.

Author Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor: The New Way to Fast-Track Your Career*, writes, "Women on average have three times as many mentors as men—but men have twice as many sponsors." She goes on to explain that women make a "huge mistake" in assuming mentorship and sponsorship are the same thing.

So, what did my mentor do for me? Well, he talked about me to my partner team. He emphasized my passion for our product, and he highlighted the steps I was taking to deepen my knowledge outside of my role's scope, such as a recent certification I was working. Honestly, he just shared about me.

You might be asking, “Ellana...did he tell you he was going to do this?” Yes, yes he did. But it wasn’t formal, he just asked if he could tell some colleagues about what we were covering in our mentorship meetings. I’m not sure either one of us really grasped at the time that we had moved into Sponsorship and Advocacy vs. pure Mentorship, but we did. That shift in our mentorship-mentee relationship fundamentally changed the trajectory of my work, and I will never, ever stop being grateful to him.

So, how does one find an Advocate or a Sponsor? You can start by examining your business relationships and reaching out to that person with whom you already have a positive, established relationship and has a history of supporting your work or your business perspectives. Frame your request and set a clear outcome. “Hey there colleague, I’m working on something amazing that will benefit the company. I’d like you to advise me through the process, but I’m also looking for your sponsorship with our partner team to see this greenlit. Would you be willing to tell them about my work?”

I know, I know, scary, right? This isn’t just meeting for coffee and sharing after a difficult day. This is asking someone to do something big. And you must be prepared for someone to say “no.” In Mentorship, someone isn’t necessarily putting themselves on the line for you, but in Advocacy and Sponsorship, they will. Even if someone does like and support you, they may not have the time or bandwidth that Advocacy and Sponsorship necessitate. Don’t ask for an Advocate or a Sponsor unless you’re comfortable having them decline.

Advocacy and Sponsorship doesn’t have to be big and formal though. We can all advocate and sponsor others and their work. Did someone create an amazing program/feature/model? Say their name in a meeting, share their name on Slack in #recognize, send an email to their manager (with permission) and call them out big and loud. Celebrate others often and frequently.

If you are reading this and you know just one colleague for whom you’d be willing to go out on a limb, do it. Reach out, find a project, lift them up and say their name.



FOR FURTHER READING ON ADVOCACY AND SPONSORSHIP:

<https://hbr.org/2021/06/dont-just-mentor-women-and-people-of-color-sponsor-them>

<https://www.mckinsey.com/about-us/new-at-mckinsey-blog/putting-women-at-the-forefront-of-technology>

<https://money.cnn.com/2017/10/24/pf/women-sponsor-mentor/index.html>

Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor: The New Way to Fast-Track Your Career
by Sylvia Ann Hewlett

5.2 | HOW TO BE THE KIND OF MENTOR THAT LIFTS AS THEY RISE

BY: MERILLY RUGLAS – SENIOR GAME DESIGNER, PLAYSTATION STUDIOS VISUAL ARTS

From the perspective of someone who had a hard time finding the right career mentor. Personally, I believe that to be a good mentor means to be someone who believes in the potential of others, who simply believes that they are capable even when they themselves don't believe it. This is the most valuable lesson I have learned from my own mentor in my Nichiren Buddhist Practice, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda. With this lesson in mind, I want to share about how I became a mentor that lifts as she rises.

Empathy was my starting point. I always try to remember how hard it was for me to not only find someone willing to mentor me, but also, how difficult it was to come up with the right questions to ask as to not waste that person's time. Therefore, now, when I meet with mentees, as the mentor, I do my best to be the one to ask questions as well. I try to get to the root cause of why this person is struggling in their career or to dig deep into what it is that they are looking to achieve. After all, someone who is looking for a mentor is doing so they can be pointed in the right direction. But most of the time, that mentee may not even know what that direction is. So as the mentor, I do my best to help them uncover that as we dialogue about their career goals and aspirations.

Giving them actionable advice is my second directive as a mentor. When I was a mentee, I remember feeling a bit at a loss whenever the feedback I received did not contain any clear actionable items that I could work on in order to improve myself and grow. Thus, I do my best now to work with the mentee to come with actionable things that they can work to contribute to either their overall goal or to prepare for our next session. For instance, I recently supported a young woman who is getting her Master's as a Game Designer and who was struggling to get hired as an intern. In spite of her having an awesome repertoire of projects in her portfolio, she was not even getting invites to interviews at all. After several dialogues about the situation, I shared with her things that she could change and improve on her resume, portfolio and her LinkedIn profile. I asked her to try to have those changes made by the next time we meet. During our next meeting, we reviewed the changes she had made and after agreeing that things looked good, I encouraged to submit three applications while I was on the call with her, and she did. I am happy to report that she was invited to interview for a top company after submitting those applications!



Lastly, following up with them is super important. I keep in touch with my mentees and I provide resources (Books, Podcasts, Job Posts) and encouragement when needed. Again, as I put myself in their shoes, I not only try to be the career mentor I wish I had, but I also try to be the person who mentions their name “in a room full of opportunities!” Whenever an opportunity comes into my radar that I think one of my mentees might be a good fit for, I always make it a point to either tag them, send them information or to drop their name on a message to the poster of the opportunity. And the more I advance in my career myself, the more I make it a point to support those around me. Because I remember what it is like to be where they are. That’s how I became a mentor who lifts others as she rises—through empathy and by believing in the potential of others. I am where I am because someone believed in mine.



5.3 | ON MENTORSHIP AS A MENTEE

BY: OLIVIA VÍŤAZKOVÁ – PROGRAM MANAGER, ONLINE SUPPORT

I first came across the concept of mentorship while helping my flatmate with her university assignment – watching an episode of 30 Rock.

Up until then I thought the best way to succeed is to do everything by yourself, even if it's difficult. However, seeing Liz Lemon's excitement over having a mentor at work gave me a pause.

Surely it's better to navigate the wilderness of work with a map or a guide rather than hacking your way through the jungle with a butter knife?

My attitude towards mentorship has changed and I was actively on the lookout for people I could learn from, the success would still be my own even if I did have help on the way.

Why find a mentor?

Finding a mentor can be beneficial for everyone, whether you're a new starter or have been in the workplace for a while. You can get advice from someone more experienced in the world of work or someone who is in a position you're aiming towards. Chances are your mentor would have had similar experiences when starting out and you can learn from their insight or past mistakes.

Another thing a mentor can help you with is accountability. For example, if you want to speak up more in meetings you might realise it will be much easier to take action rather than to come up with excuses for your next mentorship meeting.

Where to find a mentor

While your manager and your peers can be excellent sources of advice, often it's useful to have a mentor outside your immediate team as they can provide an outsider's perspective or a unique insight.

Check whether your office or department is running a mentorship or a buddy scheme, chances are there will be one you can take part in.



You can also look outside of your department or company to find your mentor within your industry. Look for industry wide schemes for women in technology or gaming and you may be able to find one who is perfect for you.

Leverage your network at work or industry events. The word networking seems to be both overused and under-defined. Just think of it as making a connection, rather than being on a sales call. Maybe the next conversation you start over a plate of nachos or in line for coffee will lead to meeting a great person who can also provide insight into excelling at your job.

What does mentorship look like?

It's always good to introduce yourself to your mentor (even though they might already know who you are) by walking them through your career and any aspirations and introduce any issues or workplace dilemmas you're experiencing.

Your mentor may ask you questions and often the act of thinking about the question or discussing a problem will lead you towards an answer. It's not an easy process but it can be very rewarding.

A good place to start your mentorship journey is the "Being a Good Mentee" LinkedIn course, which answers some common questions and will help you get started and make the most of your mentorship.

The mentor within

While going through the mentorship process it's important to keep your expectations in check. Think of your mentor as the wise Yoda or Obi-wan to your Luke Skywalker – while they can offer you advice, you are the one steering the ship into a Death Star, asking for a raise or dealing with a challenging co-worker, so make sure any decisions you're making are ones that work for you.

Another intriguing idea I've read about in *Playing Big* by Tara Mohr is to find a mentor within yourself. Whatever approach you take, learning from others while staying true to yourself is a great way to continue on your path towards success.

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