

# How to Empower your Mentee in Facing Gender Barriers

## Introduction

Many of the mentees on the programme face gender barriers which we simply don't have the context for. As a mentor, it's important to make an effort to understand the barriers that your mentee faces to be able to properly support her and her business. By following the below tips, you can gain a better understanding of these barriers and work towards supporting your mentee proactively.

## Listen to learn

Asking open questions and seeking to understand the barriers your mentee faces and how they affect her is a key step in supporting your mentee. Regardless of the things you might have in common, everyone's experiences are different.

Some barriers might be obvious on a global scale, but some might be culture-specific, or even different down to personal scale. These barriers may not always seem apparent, so it's important to remember that the only way to truly support and empower your mentee is by understanding her unique situation through active listening skills and asking lots of questions.

You can do this by giving your mentee the space to talk about her experiences and barriers, while also prompting her with questions like "Why is that difficult for you?" "What stands in your way?" or "How does that impact you?"





## **Understanding internalized barriers and beliefs**

Most gender barriers are external, but they can create internal challenges. For example, not having support and access to independence might create a confidence challenge, causing a woman entrepreneur to feel insecure and unsure of her capabilities and value.

As a mentor, it's important for you to be aware that some of the seemingly simple challenges that your mentee faces might be related back to bigger issues in her environment, and to not assume that you know the root cause or extent of them.


Instead, rely back on open questions and your active listening skills to help you and your mentee understand her beliefs about herself and their root.

## **Use your access to opportunities, training & knowledge**

Once you understand your mentee's barriers, you can offer your knowledge and skills to support her goals.

As a mentor, you have experience in your sector and in business which your mentee may not have access to. This experience and knowledge can support your mentee in multiple ways through her entrepreneurship journey.

For example, many women lack access to finance and the knowledge to navigate certain business situations – you can empower your mentee by supporting her to prepare for an important meeting, or navigate accessing finance.





## **Be flexible and encourage flexibility**

Women entrepreneurs are balancing many competing priorities; many will have care responsibilities, challenges to access an internet connection or multiple jobs. It's important to understand that your mentee is trying her best and that it might be difficult for her to manage everything at once. Having a compassionate approach with a flexible attitude will help your mentee know that you support her through these responsibilities.

For example, your mentee may find it difficult to use the Mentorloop platform regularly, so it might be more convenient for her to stay in touch via WhatsApp or other messaging platforms. Being considerate of what your mentee may need and what accommodations you can make is vital to the mentoring relationship and supporting your mentee.

## **Influence in your circles**

Wherever you are, what you say and do will impact those around you and have a ripple effect. Use what you've learned from your Mentee to educate others and to set an example; you can have a big impact in the way your circles are aware of and support women's needs, even if you don't feel like you do.

Even in your own life and work, you can think about different perspectives or experiences and be more aware of how what you or the people around you do will impact people differently.

By following this guide, you can begin to create a better understanding of the challenges that your mentee faces, and how you can better support her through those challenges. Remember that your role as a mentor is a supportive one, and the most empowering thing you can do for your mentee is offer a compassionate, listening ear.

