



Through The Looking Glass

Key findings from new research on women's leadership

A ground-breaking study exploring the leadership journeys of women across industries

What challenges do women face?
What happened to the 'glass ceiling'?
Is there a 'glass cliff'?
What helps women succeed?



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Helping leaders make a difference

Overview

In new research published this year, we found that coaching and mentoring play a crucial role in enabling women to navigate gender-related challenges in senior leadership, from hidden biases and ill-fitting expectations to the isolation of taking on challenging “glass cliff” roles.

These interventions help women build confidence, shape their leadership style and make successful transitions. But coaching is not routinely offered by organisations, leaving many women to fend for themselves and weave together the support they need.

The study highlights the need for tailored coaching and mentoring to ensure women leaders can thrive, not just survive, in their careers.



Key findings from the literature review and interviews with senior women

- It may look like the glass ceiling is broken, but gender-related biases and barriers still affect women in senior leadership across industries
- This “second-generation gender bias” holds women to male-dominated success stereotypes. These expectations put women in a ‘double-bind’, where they’re expected to behave more like men but then judged harshly when they do
- Women take on particularly challenging roles that can feel like “glass cliffs”, putting themselves at professional risk. They want to prove themselves or are branded as ‘fixers’, but then feel unsupported and isolated

Do I dare say, “Wait a minute, you're breaking me”? The need to show competence and the importance of looking ... highly unflappable. I wonder if there is just this kind of additional pressure for women..



Key findings

- Coaching and mentoring are an antidote to this loneliness, providing support to navigate the dangers of high-stakes roles and the space for women to develop into more effective, authentic and confident leaders
- A misconception of coaching as a remedial intervention persists across sectors. Successful women are not routinely offered it, especially after big promotions

You're really good. You don't need help ... this perception that coaching or mentoring or something formal was almost to suggest you weren't good.

- So, women take matters into their own hands, finding coaches, mentors and peer groups to support them over the course of their careers



How does coaching and mentoring help?

- **Gender-Related Loneliness:** Many women leaders experience isolation, especially in high-pressure leadership roles. Coaching and mentoring in groups or one-to-one provide much-needed partnerships for women, fostering confidence and self-efficacy

They say you put your oxygen mask on first ... You need to take care of yourself so you can take care of other people. If I didn't have people around me, the instinct might be just keep running into the fire

- **Glass Cliff Phenomenon:** This is when women are put in more precarious leadership positions than their male counterparts. In this study women described taking on high-challenge roles that put them at professional and personal risk. Coaching and mentoring help them navigate these dangers and mitigate the toll of such roles
- **Identity Formation and Leadership Style:** Coaching enables women to build their leadership identity, especially in male-dominated environments. It allows women to explore their strengths, make sense of conflicting feedback, face blind spots and develop authentic leadership styles, instead of conforming to out-dated expectations



The “So what?”

Ask yourself:

- How do gender-related challenges affect women in our system or organisation?
- What do women need and how do we know? How do these needs change over time and what do we offer at each stage?
- Do our leaders and coaches understand the gender-related challenges that women continue to face?
- What can we do to shift perceptions of coaching as a response to failure?
- How can women access coaching and mentoring when they really need it: *after* major promotions and in difficult roles?

What next?

- Share and discuss these findings: [get in touch](#) about setting up a facilitated group discussion
- [Find out more](#) about one-to-one coaching and group coaching for women leaders
- Read the full article [here](#)



Through the Looking Glass: how coaching and mentoring help women tackle gender-related barriers in their leadership journeys

This research was undertaken in partnership between Claudine Menashe-Jones (lead author) Dr Rebecca Newton and Patrycja Sowa and with the support of EMCC Global

It was published in the International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching, Volume XIV, Issue 1, July 2024 and is shared with permission