

Mentorship: Helping women getting a foot in the door of outdoor

By [Lizelle Mc Connell](#), issued by [Tractor Outdoor](#)

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A few years ago, I started having more conversations about how we, the out of home (OOH) media sector, could start building an industry that was more inclusive; one that women would be drawn to and want to be a part of.



Lizelle Mc Connell

At the time, I wrote a series of articles that covered the topic in all its layers: historical reasons why the outdoor media arena tended to be male-dominated; barriers that limited female participation; and the critical role of driving diversity across the local landscape.

As we settle into the latter half of 2022, it is encouraging to see that there has been a gradual but definite shift across the industry, particularly in the media agency space. I've noticed a great deal more women in senior positions when engaging with our media partners, which is encouraging to see. And considering that women make up more than 50% of the South African media and marketing industry, it's high time we started to see more female representation at the leadership table.

There has also been an increase in women-owned start-up outfits entering the OOH industry, while the overall number of women entering the outdoor media arena has also risen. When recruiting, we are seeing far more applications from women, as well as more females present at industry events.

All of these point toward the media industry's growth, maturation and progress.

But is it happening fast enough? Unfortunately, in the case of the larger OOH media owners, when it comes to female representation in senior leadership roles the needle is slow to move. And this is where I believe that mentorship – particularly driven by our industry's women leaders – can provide a helping hand.

Mentorship has a critical role to play in an ever-changing, fast-moving industry where new developments, challenges and opportunities are par for the course. Having a sounding board who can guide you in both your professional and personal journey can make all the difference, helping to propel you up the next rung on your career ladder. Having this network of great minds to lean on is crucial.

Former Fortune 100 Division President and CEO Maryann Bruce summed it up well when she said, *"As senior leaders, we have an obligation to mentor and support women in the workforce – to aid in their professional development, to help build their confidence, and to guide them through challenges as they advance in their careers. I believe mentoring is one of the top strategies to help close the gender gap in business leadership."*

As leaders, our responsibility is to ensure that we support other women throughout their journeys. Women face a slew of fears that don't seem to plague men (at least, not to the same degree): we doubt ourselves, we avoid certain roles that we believe to be beyond our capabilities, and we are also more likely to suffer from imposter syndrome. But the flip side of this is that, as leaders, we better empathise with these fears in other women: we understand them, have faced them at some or other stage in our careers, and have put them to bed. *Who better to help others tackle their fears than us?*

Mentees benefit from having someone in their corner who can provide guidance and expose them to new ways of thinking

and opportunities that they may not be privy to otherwise. On the other hand, mentors benefit from knowing they have helped bring their mentees one step closer to realising their full potential – and often learn something new along the way!

A project that I am very passionate about – and which I started in 2020 together with Lockstep Leadership Development – is my Women in Leadership Masterclass series. These sessions are always unrecorded, as I wanted to create a safe space for women in the industry to connect, to share their stories, challenges and opportunities while building a network of mentors for each other.

Whether through late-night training sessions, coffee dates, introductions to new clients or identifying new career opportunities, I would not be where I am today if it was not for the women who opened doors for me. The network of women in my life has fundamentally changed my career, and so I believe that we must pay it forward and prioritise helping others get a foot in the door.

I challenge every women leader within the media industry to identify one woman within their immediate network who they can support in some small way: a referral, introduction to an industry connection or simple word of advice has the power to effect ripples of change for years to come.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lizelle Mb Connell is the sales director at Tractor Outdoor.

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