

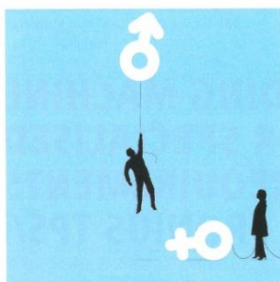
# Rail Professional

## Opinion

### A fresh pair of eyes

Can mentoring help us achieve a more gender balanced railway asks **Jodi Savage**?

The Institute of Leadership and Management recently asked British managers how confident they feel in their professional roles. Half of female respondents admitted that they had self-doubt regarding their performance and career choice, compared to just a third of male respondents. Crucially, the study also found that women with low self-confidence were less likely to be appointed to management positions, and as a direct result, were less likely to achieve their career ambitions. Additionally, an internal Hewlett Packard study revealed women only felt willing to apply for promotions when they were over-qualified for a position, or felt that they met 100 per cent of the job specification. The study showed that men, on the other hand, felt confident applying when they met just 60 per cent of the specification. I myself have seen many instances of this, where I have tried to encourage female colleagues to apply for promotion that they'd be perfect for, only for them to let the



opportunity pass them by because there were one or two requirements in the job description which they felt that they had no experience of. I have also known male colleagues apply for the very same positions despite only having experience in one or two areas! The difference is clearly in the mindset. In my opinion, this lack of self-confidence is particularly felt in the rail industry, where we have very few senior female role models to inspire and encourage the junior female workforce about the career possibilities that could lie ahead.

## Women in Rail

Women in Rail is dedicated to helping more women in the industry achieve their career goals. We've held self-confidence workshops, and will hold more in 2015, to try and raise that concept among our members. Interestingly, one of the aspects of the workshops is to explore why self-doubt in our professional lives even exists in the first place. By identifying the problem, we can find a personalised and effective solution.

As much as many of us may like to - you can't eradicate self-doubt overnight. But, by inspiring confidence and encouraging women to take little steps out of their comfort zone on a regular basis, you can slowly see it melt away. Women in Rail has found that one of the most effective ways to overcome self-doubt, particularly in a male dominated environment, is through a one-on-one mentoring relationship.

One of Women in Rail's core initiatives was to establish a successful mentoring scheme. After much planning, we successfully launched the scheme last November. We've produced information packs for our mentors and mentees to give practical advice and information on how to get the most out of a mentoring relationship. We've also held informative evenings for our mentors and mentees where we discuss the differences between mentoring women and men, as well as giving our mentors and mentees the opportunity to meet each other.

I would urge every woman who is interested in furthering their career and fulfilling their potential to seek out a mentor, either through the Women in Rail mentoring scheme, or in your own workplace. I firmly believe that having a mentor is a keystone to achieving your career ambitions. I took the plunge this year and asked a senior colleague to be my mentor. When we embarked on our mentoring relationship, neither of us really knew what to expect. However, a year down the line I can honestly say that I have learnt so much. My mentor has guided me through areas which I previously found difficult, enabling me to overcome challenges with renewed confidence and a different perspective.



In short, I've really developed my professional awareness and skills. However, it's not just a one way street, my mentor also says that he's gained a lot from the experience describing it as very rewarding, and it also gave him a great opportunity to see the business and industry through a fresh pair of eyes.

For a mentee, the gift of having someone to listen, advise, challenge and nurture your productive thinking is invaluable. For the mentor, the positive feeling of giving something back is equally beneficial. After all confidence breeds confidence, and the benefit of being able to talk to a senior colleague makes them seem more human, in turn making their position at the top seem attainable.

If you would like to become a mentor or a mentee through the Women in Rail mentoring schemes please do not hesitate to get in touch with us, we would be delighted to help you fulfil your career ambitions!

Jodi Savage is sales account manager at Wabtec Rail and a board member of Women in Rail  
 LinkedIn: Women in Rail Twitter: @WomeninRail  
 Visit: [www.womeninrail.org](http://www.womeninrail.org)

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