



# Women in Steel:

## Progress & Perspectives



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#### Where did your education and career start?

I had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up. I'm from a rural Midwestern town where most of the women I knew became teachers, nurses or secretaries. Those paths were respected — but they were also expected. And even at a young age, I felt a pull to explore something different, even if I couldn't yet define what that was.

In an effort to figure it out, I scheduled an appointment with a college guidance counselor at a state school about an hour from my hometown. He was running late, and as I sat outside his office, I noticed a flyer on the wall: "New York Nannies Wanted." It felt completely out of reach — and that's exactly why I wrote down the number. Two weeks later, I was living with a family just outside New York City.

That decision changed everything.

That nanny job led to my first corporate role as a receptionist, where I had a front-row seat between two business owners. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was being trained every day — absorbing how they approached business development, operations, and decision-making. They didn't just give me a job; they gave me exposure, and that expanded what I believed was possible for myself.

From there, a move to the Carolinas introduced me to an entrepreneur building an empire. I became his right hand, learning how to operate inside growth, ambiguity and scale. It was fast-paced, demanding and one of the most formative experiences of my career.

Then, a mentor challenged me to take a leap into training and development. I trusted her — and that decision reshaped my path. Eventually, I followed her again into the manufacturing world, where she was a vice president of operations and I stepped into a role as director of new product development. I led an engineering team at an aftermarket truck accessory company, where we designed and built steel truck and Jeep bumpers for off-roading.

On paper, that path may look unconventional. But there's a clear throughline: mentorship.

Every pivotal move in my career was influenced by someone who saw potential in me, challenged me to grow and opened doors I didn't even know existed. I didn't follow a traditional path — I followed people who invested in me.

And over time, that shifted. I went from being the one learning from mentors to becoming one.

#### Before launching the Pink Mentor Network, you were leading an all-male engineering team in manufacturing. What drew you into that environment, and what did that experience reveal to you about gaps in mentorship?

As I shared, I followed a mentor into that role — but like many business realities, my department was eventually moved under a different leader, and I no longer had her guidance day to day. That shift was more than organizational — it was personal. For the first time in my career, I felt the absence of mentorship in a very real way.

So I went looking for it.

What I quickly realized was that the rooms I was in didn't always have the voices I needed. I was often the only woman, and there weren't other women in those spaces modeling how to navigate, speak up or lead. As an introvert, that gap felt even wider — I knew I had

something to say, but I didn't yet know how to say it in those environments.

Instead of waiting, I decided to build what I couldn't find.

I started Pink Mentor Network as a personal project, simply trying to create access — for myself and for others. I began reaching out to accomplished women and inviting them to participate in a mentorship event. I promised them a stage, a microphone and an audience... none of which I had at the time. But I figured it out.

The first event was called "Finding Your Voice." It brought together a newswoman, a politician and a professor — women with very different experiences, perspectives and ways of leading. That diversity was intentional, because I realized mentorship doesn't come from one person — it comes from many voices, many stories and many ways of seeing the world.

What surprised me most wasn't just what I learned from them — it was what happened in the room. The women who showed up — many of whom were complete strangers connected only by a shared desire for growth — became accountability partners. There was an immediate sense of connection, honesty and momentum.

That experience fundamentally changed how I think about mentorship.

I stopped looking for a single mentor, and started seeking mentorship in many forms — through conversations, perspectives and opportunities. It's not always about finding the person; it's about staying open to learning in every interaction.

To this day, I believe: I've never met a woman I couldn't learn from.

### Can you share a specific moment where mentorship or sponsorship changed your career path, and how that experience shaped what you've built today?

Frankly, it's hard for me to point to a single moment — because nearly every growth opportunity in my career has been shaped by mentorship or sponsorship in some form.

What I've learned, though, is that we often think too narrowly about what mentorship actually is.

In the early days of building Pink Mentor Network, this became incredibly clear to me. Mentorship doesn't look the same at every stage of your career. Sometimes it's a leader who opens a door. Other times it's a cheerleader who builds your confidence, a challenger who pushes you further than you would go on your own, or a confidante who helps you process tough decisions.

At its core, mentorship is much simpler than we make it — it's learning from someone else's experience.

What changed my trajectory was learning how to be intentional about that process. Instead of waiting for the "right" mentor to appear, I started asking myself: What do I need next? Is it a skill? A mindset shift? Exposure to a different way of leading? Clarity on a goal?

Once I had that answer, I looked for people who had already achieved it.

I would listen closely to how they thought, how they made decisions, how they navigated challenges. I'd process their experiences, apply what was relevant to my own path, and — this part is critical — circle back with gratitude and results.

That approach turned mentorship from something passive into something active. It allowed me to learn from many people, not just one, and to continuously evolve as my career evolved.

And that philosophy is exactly what shaped what I've built today.

Pink Mentor Network isn't about matching people with a single mentor — it's about teaching them how to access mentorship everywhere. Because when you understand how to learn from others intentionally, mentorship stops being something you wait for... and becomes something you create.

### You've spent much of your career in male-populated spaces and now work to support women navigating those environments. What has been most meaningful or rewarding about that journey for you personally?

The most meaningful part of this journey has been watching women go from being mentored... to becoming a mentor.

I truly believe there are two pivotal moments in a career: when you start, and when you finally understand what all of that effort was for. Becoming a mentor is often the moment where it all comes full circle.

I've had the privilege of seeing women who once questioned their voice, their value or their place in the room begin to lead with confidence — and then turn around and create space for someone else. That shift is powerful. It's not just personal growth; it's legacy.

Because when a woman becomes a mentor, she doesn't just change her own trajectory — she changes the trajectory of others. She shortens the learning curve, expands access and makes the path a little more visible for the women coming behind her.

Having spent much of my career in male-populated environments, I know how isolating it can feel to not see yourself reflected. That's why this evolution matters so much to me. It's how we move from being the only one in the room... to making sure we're not the last.

That's the work. And there's nothing more rewarding than watching it happen in real time.

### You now work with organizations on mentorship, internal mobility and talent development. Where do you see companies struggling the most when it comes to developing and retaining diverse talent?

Where I see companies struggling the most is that we've overcomplicated something that is fundamentally human.

You can't manufacture mentorship through a program alone. Too often, organizations focus on matching people, tracking participation and checking boxes — without actually building the skills or culture that make mentorship effective.

The reality is, mentorship has to be developed on both sides. Leaders need to be trained on how to mentor — how to listen, challenge and create meaningful growth experiences. At the same time, employees need to be equipped to find mentorship, not just wait to be assigned it.

This perspective didn't come from theory — it came from practice.

After that first Pink Mentor Network event, I went on to host over 200 more. And I kept very intentional data on why women were showing up. What emerged was a clear pattern: there are key moments in our careers where mentorship becomes critical.

When people access mentorship during those moments, they accelerate. When they don't, they often stall — or learn the hard way through trial and error.

That insight is what I bring into organizations today.

I help them identify where those mentorship moments exist across the employee experience — whether it's onboarding, stepping into leadership, navigating change or seeking advancement — and then build the conditions for mentorship to show up in those moments.

Because retention and development don't come from more programs. They come from people feeling supported, challenged and seen at the right time in their career.

### **What advice would you give to young women entering industries where they may not immediately see people who look like them, especially when it comes to finding or building the right support system?**

My advice is simple, but not always easy: don't wait to be included — learn how to build what you need.

If you walk into a space and don't immediately see people who look like you, it can feel isolating. But it can also become a defining advantage — because it forces you to be intentional about how you grow, who you learn from and how you show up.

Start by shifting how you think about support. Don't look for one perfect mentor who checks every box. Instead, look for people who have mastered something you want to learn — whether that's confidence in the room, technical expertise, leadership presence or decision-making. Learn from many, not just one.

Be proactive. Ask questions. Stay curious. Observe how others operate. Some of the most valuable mentorship you'll receive won't be formal — it will come from paying attention and applying what you see.

At the same time, don't limit yourself to only learning from people who look like you. Some of my greatest growth came from mentors who had very different backgrounds and perspectives — but who were willing to invest in me and challenge me.



And just as importantly — find your community, even if you have to build it outside of your organization. The people who understand your experience, who hold you accountable and who remind you of your value will be critical to your growth.

Because here's the truth: the goal isn't just to succeed in those spaces. It's to stay, grow and eventually create space for others.

You may not see the path when you walk in — but that doesn't mean you're not meant to help build it.

### **Do you have any professional development book recommendations that you'd like to share?**

I love this question — because my answer is a little unconventional.

Many people don't know this, but I have a reading disability. It's always been difficult for me to read and retain information in traditional ways. For a long time, I saw that as a limitation — but over time, it actually shaped how I learn in a much more applied, meaningful way.

I'm especially drawn to autobiographies and memoirs — hearing directly how someone thought, made decisions, navigated challenges, and built something over time. It feels more real, more practical, and more transferable.

Some of my favorites on Audible include Julia Child, Walt Disney, Howard Stern, Anne Lamott, Bob Iger and Kenny Chesney. Each of them comes from a completely different world, but that's what makes it so valuable — the diversity of perspective and experience. ♦