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## Work Networks and Mentoring Less Effective for African-American Men

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By Rick Nauert PhD *Senior News Editor*

Reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on December 20, 2011

Climbing the corporate ladder typically involves a heavy dose of mentoring and strong social networking within your organization — at least, that is the recipe for Caucasians.

New research suggests the career path for African American men is more difficult as opportunities are difficult to secure.

A University of Georgia study found that African-American men do not receive the same measurable benefits from networking and having a mentor that Caucasians do.

Nevertheless, the finding shouldn't discourage African Americans from seeking mentoring and networking opportunities, says study co-author Lillian Eby.

Researchers believe the findings suggest that women and minorities should think broadly about the mentors they choose and with whom they network.

People tend to have professional and social networks that are composed of people who are similar to them, she explained, and African Americans remain underrepresented in high-level positions.

"If African-American men are picking mentors who are like them, then they're more likely to be networking with people who have less power and influence within an organization," Eby said, "which may be why mentoring is not predicting career success for them."

The study, published in the December issue of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, examined data from nearly 250 college-educated, African-American men to determine which factors were most closely related to their career success.



Study co-author C. Douglas Johnson said the intent was to see if conclusions from previous studies with Caucasians held true for African Americans.

Unlike mentoring and networking, universal predictors of success were level of education, training and willingness to move for new opportunities.

"The study shows that if you are willing to put forth the necessary effort and obtain the education and appropriate training, then you can achieve career success," said Johnson.

For purposes of the study, career success was defined with measures such as annual compensation, number of promotions in one's career and managerial level. Yet Johnson emphasized that career success also involves less objective components, such as personal satisfaction and work-life balance.

Mentoring was associated with greater career satisfaction in this population, and the researchers said that choosing multiple mentors might be a way for people to gain both objective and subjective career gains.

Although the findings show ethnic and racial divergences, Eby discourages organizations from implementing formal mentoring programs created for specific racial, ethnic or gender groups, since they can be viewed as favoritism and perpetuate stereotypes that those individuals need extra help to succeed.

Creating opportunities for all employees to expand their skills and knowledge, however, can benefit both the individual and the organization.

"Especially in a bad economy, having a climate that encourages learning and development is probably a better strategy than programs that are targeted toward a particular group," she said.

Source: University of Georgia

Man working on computer photo by shutterstock.

### **APA Reference**

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