



When Your Best
Mentor Is ... Mom



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When Your Best Mentor Is ... Mom

More women take on the role of professional mentor to their daughters

A growing number of women managers and professionals are mentoring their own daughters. Former Catalyst President and CEO Ilene Lang discusses her personal relationship with her children.



By **SUE SHELLNBARGER**

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4 COMMENTS

Many young women will be getting together with their mentors on Sunday—their moms.

Few of today's senior managers had their own mothers as professional role models. They were more likely to be among the first women to rise to high-ranking jobs in their companies or fields. A growing number of women managers and professionals today, however, are mentoring their own daughters—sometimes in the same fields—as the young women build careers.

Taking on this new maternal role as a professional mentor can be challenging. These relationships can be rewarding, but also fraught with tension, as young women strive for independence and mothers walk the line between giving needed guidance and meddling too much.

Parents who mentor their children must avoid imposing their own views, says Ilene Lang, former president and chief executive officer of Catalyst, a New York nonprofit provider of research and advice on advancing women. Mentor relationships should be driven by the younger person. Ms. Lang adds, “You have to be conscious of, ‘How much of this is my agenda, vs. their agenda?’ ”



Krystina Cruise, right, decided to follow her mother, Jeanne Kane, left, into finance. She says she wanted to be as challenged in her work as her mom. *PHOTO: ANN BILLINGSLEY*

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ought to do what she wanted to do.”

Jeanne Kane, a former sales manager and managing director at Lehman Brothers, and her husband Paul Zaykowski, who runs an investment partnership from their New York home, never pressured their daughter, Krystina Cruise, or her three younger brothers to work on Wall Street. Ms. Kane, 57 years old, often took Krystina to Take Your Daughter to Work Day at her office, she says, but “my belief was that she

When Ms. Cruise enrolled as an art history major at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, where she'd been recruited to play lacrosse, "the decision was all hers," Ms. Kane says. Ms. Cruise had second thoughts about the field of art as she neared graduation in 2010. She found the art world "too quiet and slow" when she interned at an art museum, and paying jobs were scarce. Having watched her mother work hard at the office, helping colleagues solve problems, Ms. Cruise knew she wanted to be just as busy and challenged in her work.

Ms. Cruise also was fascinated by the financial crisis on Wall Street. Her parents had discussed current events with her and her siblings at the dinner table, instilling an interest in world news, and she had minored in economics at Bates. With many professionals fleeing Wall Street, Ms. Cruise saw an opportunity to get into the industry amid major changes "that no one had experienced before. That was what intrigued me: No one knew what was going to happen next."

Shortly before graduation, she told Ms. Kane, “Mom, the more I think about it, maybe I want to try for something on Wall Street.”

Ms. Kane was surprised, she says. She’d left her last job at Lehman, as head of diversity programs, several months before the firm collapsed in 2008 and returned to work in 2010 as managing director of a boutique investment bank. She later joined her husband’s firm as a research analyst. She knew Ms. Cruise would face a steep learning curve but saw that as an opportunity for her daughter. Her response was upbeat: “Go for it.”

She tapped her network to help Ms. Cruise find openings. Her contacts also delivered some painful feedback. Ms. Cruise thought she’d done well in an interview at a financial-information company. When she didn’t get the job. Ms. Kane learned from her contacts that she’d given a wrong answer when asked, “How do we make money?” She told her daughter, “It’s a bummer you didn’t get this, but you probably shouldn’t have gotten it because you didn’t know that answer.”

“It hurts to hear that, especially from your mother, but at the end of the day, she was right,” Ms. Cruise says. “You have to be 100% on your game, do your homework and be prepared.”

When another employer, an investment bank, asked Ms. Cruise as part of the hiring process to create amortization formulas for three different types of mortgages, showing principal, interest and cash flow, Ms. Kane told her, “You’re on your own.” Ms. Cruise researched the problem and tapped her own network, asking the father of a friend, an economics professor, to check her work. She got the job, as an analyst based in New York.

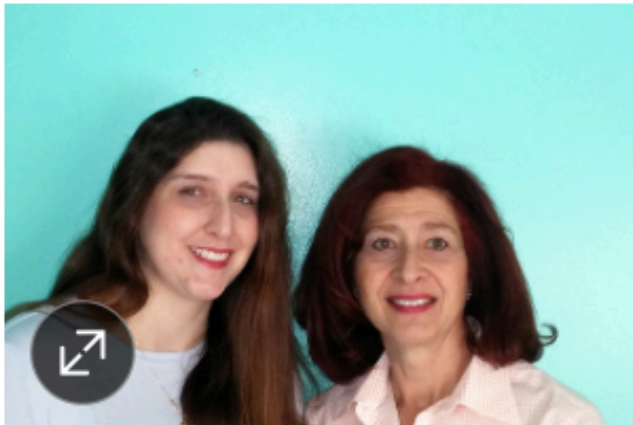
Parents are often uniquely able to help young adults with sensitive questions about career planning, corporate culture or office politics that they wouldn’t feel comfortable asking a colleague, or don’t even know how to ask, says Joanne Cleaver, a Chicago author of “The Career Lattice,” a book about planning for complex career paths. Sometimes, “it’s safer to ask your mom.”

When Ms. Cruise was struggling to get along with a critical supervisor, “I just wanted to shut her down and not talk to her,” Ms. Cruise says. She vented her frustrations to Ms. Kane.

“Krys, take some deep breaths,” Ms. Kane told her. “It’s OK to get upset, and it’s OK to be emotional, but then you really have to step back. In a professional setting, emotions generally aren’t going to help you.”

The advice helped her resolve the tensions diplomatically, Ms. Cruise says, adding, “I couldn’t have gone to anyone else with that problem.”

Ms. Cruise, who is 26, now works as an investment-bank analyst in Atlanta, where she lives with her new husband, Chris Cruise. When they married last October, she wore her mother’s wedding dress—updated to suit current styles.



Christina Flynn, a senior audit manager at KPMG, and her mother, Teresa Danile, co-owner of a tax-accounting firm. *PHOTO: JOE DANILE*

Mothers are more likely than fathers to serve as mentors to their young adult children. Women in general are more likely than men to mentor anyone, male or female, according to a 2010 study of 742 managers and executives by Catalyst.

The challenge, for a mom, is “separating ‘Am I here for you professionally, giving hard, cold advice and opening doors for you, or am I here for you because you just need a hug today?’ ” says Ms. Lang of Catalyst.

Christina Flynn, 35, a senior audit manager at KPMG in Roseland, N.J., sometimes calls her mother in the evening to talk about challenges at work.

“I try to keep it at the level where I’m just a sounding board,” says her mother, Teresa Danile, Somerset, N.J., co-owner of a tax-accounting firm.

Ms. Flynn says she appreciates that her mother never tells her what to do. “She might say, ‘If I were in this situation, I might do this,’” Ms. Flynn says, which is “incredibly helpful and valuable.” Her mother also helps her accept things she can’t change, telling her “to let it go, ‘you don’t have to take on the world,’” she says.

Dr. Danile, 60, a retired university professor of accounting and taxation, says most male mentors she has worked with “tell you what not to do. A guy would tell me, ‘Make sure you don’t do this, don’t do that.’” Women mentors tend to provide more emotional support. “As women, we need to encourage each other to forget our fears,” she says.

Ms. Flynn credits her mother with motivating her to overcome her shyness and get involved in professional groups. “I’ve always taken my mother’s advice: ‘You’ve got to try it,’” she says. She joined the New Jersey affiliate of the 700-member American Woman’s Society of Certified Public Accountants. Last year, she was elected president of the national organization.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/when-your-best-mentor-is-mom-1430849365#livefyre-comment>