



## **The 100% Club: Collaboration over Competition**

*Demonstrating the Power of a Gender Based Network*

**By Faith Borland**

## Purpose of this Research

This research provides qualitative evidence of the benefits that members of The 100% Club gain from being part of a gender based network.

## About The 100% Club

The 100% Club is a multi-sector networking alliance dedicated to gender equality and advisory business specialising in investment stewardship, the integration of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors and diversity.

Founded by Deborah Gilshan in October 2011, the purpose of The 100% Club networking alliance is to:

- provide opportunities for members to hear from inspirational role models and build their social capital
- empower the female talent pipeline
- promote the power of networking for career advancement and personal development
- demonstrate the value of a gender based network as a powerful force for change.

For more information, please go to: [www.the100percentclub.co.uk](http://www.the100percentclub.co.uk)

## Research Process

This research was completed by Faith Borland, a recent Master's graduate from the University of Amsterdam. The research is based on interviews with members of The 100% Club completed in summer 2020. It was undertaken as part of Faith's undergraduate dissertation entitled *"Winning Women? Investigating a Women's Networking Group"* at the University of Cambridge for her degree in Geography. Faith was awarded a first class mark for her dissertation.

## The 100% Club: In Three Words

Faith asked each member for three words to describe The 100% Club. This word cloud shows the wide range of responses to this question.



The following areas were identified as some of the key benefits for members of The 100% Club:

- **Supportive Environment**
- **Confidence Building**
- **Friendship**
- **Development and Learning**
- **Collaboration**

## Supportive Environment

Many members described The 100% Club as a safe space where they could speak to other women, share experiences and receive support. Members felt that there was *“a feeling of trust”* within the network that made them feel comfortable and so they could be open and honest in discussions without fear of judgement. The atmosphere of trust and openness meant that members felt able to discuss issues that they were finding challenging and could ask for support or suggestions about how to deal with them.

The 100% Club was described as a *“safe environment to ask for advice”* by several members with one noting that there were very few similar spaces for women, particularly those in senior positions, to be able to express themselves freely in this way. Some members also commented that this atmosphere of safety and confidentiality was felt by speakers, as well as members, with both groups feeling able to share their experiences candidly.

One member commented:

*“Sometimes they [the speakers] talk very openly and honestly about things that have gone wrong for them or things that have been very difficult, very challenging, where they’ve failed.”*

This openness was identified by one member as helping women feel less alone in the problems they faced and another said that The 100% Club helped to make her concerns feel valid and listened to.

## Confidence Building

Interviewees discussed how The 100% Club helped them build and restore their confidence. Many members described how attending The 100% Club gatherings made them feel more confident, resilient and gave them the *“breathing space to believe in themselves”*.

This was particularly important for members who worked in male dominated industries, where they were often the only woman in the room at work. The 100% Club was a space where they could acknowledge the challenges they faced rather than having to put on a positive exterior which was expected elsewhere. Importantly, the network was not just a place to vent. For some, it was somewhere to restore their self-belief, *“take strength”* from the other members and feel proud again.

One member described how The 100% Club gatherings gave her the energy to continue despite the challenges she faced in her work with another commenting that attending meetings always *“makes you feel stronger”*. For some members, the network encouraged them to continue to strive for success in their work with one noting: *“It gives you the confidence to aim high”*.

## Friendship

Many women discussed how their fellow members of The 100% Club had become their friends over time. One member felt that friendship was one of the most important values of the network and another described it as being *“friendship based”*. For her, going to an event was *“like meeting up with friends”*, which helped create the supportive and trusting environment. The 100% Club gatherings gave many members the chance to catch up with friends they had made in the network over several years of attending.

For some members, the fact that these friends had been made in a business-focused context was important to them as this created a shared knowledge of each other’s work and allowed for easy understanding and discussion of this important aspect of their lives, which was not always the case with other friends or family members.

## Development and Learning

When asked what they gained from The 100% Club gatherings, learning was mentioned repeatedly by members. Multiple types of learning happened through the network. Learning came from different sources, including the other attendees, speakers and the founder of The 100% Club. It covered various topics encompassing industry insights, job opportunities and information about personal qualities, such as leadership styles.

A member noted that The 100% Club gatherings benefited her by *“meeting interesting people, learning about them and what they do, whether they’re a delegate or whether they’re a speaker. It adds to my knowledge and my self-development”*. For one member, learning was a central part of the ethos of The 100% Club whilst another commented that she learnt something new every time she attended a gathering. A member described The 100% Club as a space that challenged her to learn things that she *“wouldn’t otherwise pick up and learn”* on her own.

## Collaboration

Collaboration was consistently emphasised in conversations with The 100% Club members, who highly valued this aspect of the network. When asked to describe The 100% Club, one member stated *“It’s all about collaboration, it’s all about cooperation”*. Another member suggested that one of the most important things about the network for her was its focus on *“collaboration over competition”*. This feeling was echoed by another member who said:

*“Being around The 100% Club women there’s less one-upmanship... You’re not trying to interrupt each other; you’re not just trying to be heard over everyone else. It’s just genuinely a collaborative feeling where you’re there to support each other... You don’t feel like you’re in competition with each other.”*

Members felt that women in the network were not there to network transactionally and gain an advantage over each other but instead to genuinely support and help other women rather than *“trying to climb over one another to get to the top”*.

Another member put it differently, stating that *“there is a whole room of women who will willingly help each other out”* at The 100% Club gatherings.



### **Overall Reflections from Members of The 100% Club**

The members of The 100% Club were very positive about the network and felt that they gained a lot from being part of it. As the interviews were carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, many members were keen to return to in-person networking and were hopeful that The 100% Club gatherings would be able to go back to this format when possible.



### **Research Participants**

The following members of The 100% Club took part in this research:

Jennifer Anderson, Ann-Marie Atkins, Tracey Brady, Caroline Evans, Catherine Jackson, Alison Kennedy, Susan Martin, Sarah Maynard, Clare Payn, Yvonne Soulsby, Andrea Sparke and Lorna Youssouf.

### **Acknowledgements**

Deborah Gilshan and Faith Borland would like to thank the members of The 100% Club who participated in this research.

Deborah Gilshan would like to thank (i) Faith Borland for undertaking this research on the impact of The 100% Club and (ii) all of the members of The 100% Club for their participation in the network.

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First published on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022 by The 100% Club Limited, The Scalpel, 18<sup>th</sup> Floor, 52 Lime Street, London EC3M 7AF. Company Number: 11771281

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