



SPONSORING WOMEN TO SUCCESS



About Catalyst

Founded in 1962, Catalyst is the leading nonprofit membership organization working globally with businesses and the professions to build inclusive workplaces and expand opportunities for women and business. With offices in the United States, Canada, and Europe, and more than 400 preeminent corporations as members, Catalyst is the trusted resource for research, information, and advice about women at work. Catalyst annually honors exemplary organizational initiatives that promote women's advancement with the Catalyst Award.

SPONSORING WOMEN TO SUCCESS

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Catalyst Publication Code D109

ISBN # 0-89584-319-6

SORTING OUT SPONSORSHIP

For years, when organizations and leaders examined why women weren't making it to the top, one barrier surfaced over and over again—lack of mentoring.¹ So why is it that after so much focus on mentoring, particularly for women, the tide has not shifted? Why are there still so few women rising to the top of organizations? Well, it has to do with power and what power can do for you when you are connected to the right source—or not.

In the midst of the discussion that has erupted around mentoring and how it is essential for development yet insufficient for advancing to the senior-most levels,² recent research³ and conversations⁴ have pointed to a more influential and specific professional relationship: sponsorship. Despite the increasingly widespread attention in organizations and the media about sponsorship, questions abound. What exactly is sponsorship? Who are sponsors, and what do they do that make them sponsors? Is sponsorship just mentoring couched in a different term? This research addresses these questions and provides a clear picture on what sponsorship is—and isn't—based on the experiences of people well-positioned to provide answers: executives who are acting as sponsors and high-performing employees who are currently being sponsored. The report also presents data and practices that provide actionable advice on how to foster sponsorship within organizations.

Sponsorship is Focused on Advancement, Predicated on Power

Many people confuse sponsorship with mentoring. While a mentor may be a sponsor, sponsors go beyond the traditional social, emotional, and personal growth development provided by many mentors.⁵ Sponsorship is focused on advancement and predicated on power. A recent *Harvard Business Review* article describes sponsorship as active support by someone appropriately placed in the organization who has significant influence on decision-making processes or structures and who is advocating for, protecting, and fighting for the career advancement of an individual.⁶

Sponsorship is High Stakes for the Sponsor, the Protégé, and the Organization

In openly recommending high-performing employees for assignments, opportunities, or promotions, sponsors leverage their own power and reputational capital. Therefore, sponsorship is high stakes—for the person who puts his or her reputation on the line, for the person on the receiving end of the sponsorship who must “deliver the goods,” and for the organization itself. When sponsorship works well, as one executive we interviewed put it:

...It actually gives you the freedom to take some more risk, which is what you need to actually make an impact and grow [the company].

—Man Sponsor


Sponsorship is Important for Women

Beyond that, sponsorship is particularly important for women. As Catalyst research on women and men in the pipeline has shown, women start out behind and often remain behind men, even with mentoring.⁷ However, when women's mentors are highly placed, women are just as likely as men to get promoted.⁸ That's where power and sponsorship come into play. A highly placed, influential mentor, more precisely called a sponsor, goes far beyond giving general career feedback and advice; a sponsor can propel a protégé to the top of a list or pile of candidates or even eliminate the list itself. As one high performer we interviewed put it:

If [you're with] the right people, they can give you that different look. They will listen to you more. It's... like the sun goes up a few wattage points.

—Woman Protégée





Done well, sponsorship can serve as a highly effective intervention to accelerate women’s career velocity. Lack of sponsorship is one indicator of what’s really been holding many women back—exclusion from organizations’ most influential networks. Sponsorship can finesse access to these powerful networks, providing impressive benefits to leaders, high-performing employees, and organizations themselves.



For this study, Catalyst conducted one-hour interviews with 93 executives and high performers at six top global organizations⁹ to better understand sponsorship, its associated benefits, and how organizations can build more transparency around sponsorship. *Fostering Sponsorship Success Among High Performers and Leaders* is a companion tool that further outlines recommendations and potential challenges associated with sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP IS KEY TO ADVANCING HIGH PERFORMERS

According to the leaders with whom we spoke, sponsorship was critically important to advancing high-performing employees within the organization. As one executive put it:

A lot of decisions...are made when you're not in the room, so you need somebody who can...advocate for you and can bring up the important things of why you should advance. You need somebody or people at that table...speaking for you....I can't think of a person who rose without a sponsor or significant sponsors.

—Woman Sponsor

Sponsorship Prepares Protégés for the Complexities of New Roles or Assignments

When asked to name the most important things their sponsors had done to help make them more successful, the protégés with whom we spoke said coaching and advice made the most difference. Additionally, the sponsors we interviewed mentioned that coaching and advice were benefits they had received from their own sponsors throughout their careers. Distinct from traditional mentoring,¹⁰ much of what these leaders identified was more sophisticated types of coaching and advice specific to stretching into a role, position, or assignment for which sponsors were recommending them. This advice was actionable and targeted, designed to help prepare protégés for the complexities of these new roles or assignments.

Sponsorship Helps Protégés Meet Unique Executive Challenges

As the quotes below reveal, this advice and coaching actually helped protégés make the leap to work successfully through unique situations and challenges that arose, particularly at the executive level:

I'd say from client service delivery, [my sponsor] taught me how to always be one step ahead and to excel. [He] taught me the firm economics, meaning what would make other leaders happy in terms of the financial metrics we were trying to achieve, which certainly helped.

—Woman Sponsor

You hit a plateau level of senior management, and then to move to that executive level—I found was a big jump. That's where [my sponsors] really supported me and guided me and helped me not go off the rails too much.

—Woman Sponsor

Sponsorship Helps Protégés Determine Where, When, and How to Make Strategic Contributions

This guidance and support was equally helpful when protégés sought advice on how they could make broader, more strategic contributions to the organization:

One of the things...that's definitely on my goals is...to figure out what are some of the ways that I can flex my entrepreneurial muscle, and with a lot of the things that are happening [in the broader socio-political context], I see a lot of opportunities for new services for [my organization]. So [sponsors]...provide a sounding board...so if I were to do X, what do I need to do to make that happen? Who do I need to talk to? How do I present the business case? How do I identify the marketplace? Those types of things.

—Man Protégé



Sponsorship Helps Mitigate Perceived Risk

One executive described how sponsorship, and particularly the advice and coaching provided by his sponsor, helped move him into a new role and mitigate the perceived risk that can accompany someone with little experience in a given arena:

...He singled me out to develop. [He] spent time helping me develop those additional skills, and then truly sponsored me for that role and put himself at risk in front of the CEO and senior leadership, saying, "Look, [he's got less experience]...than some, but I think he's ready, I've been preparing him, and I will help him be successful in his role."

—Man Sponsor

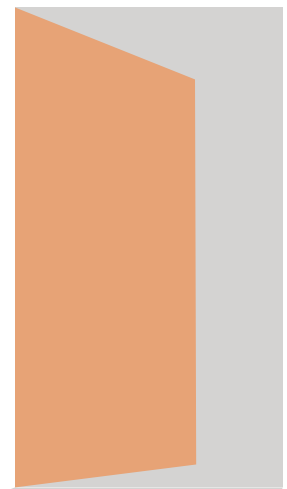
overall goals. However, if sponsors have a good understanding of protégés' long-term career aspirations and an intimate understanding of advancement paths within the organization, this knowledge can make all the difference. Sponsors can show protégés how particular positions or offerings that may not seem relevant or desirable at first glance can be a value-add to their overall career development. As one high performer shared:

[My sponsors] guided me to maximize my chances of getting those opportunities [that would advance my career]. They've advised me when...opportunities were not particularly good....Really good advice, you know? They help you navigate the tough stuff and the easy stuff.

—Woman Protégée

Sponsorship Helps Protégés Recognize the Value-Add to Their Career

Sponsors also provide needed guidance around opportunities necessary to a protégé's desired career path. Protégés may not recognize that a particular assignment will help them reach their



SPONSORSHIP GIVES HIGH PERFORMERS GREATER OPPORTUNITY TO EXCEL

Sponsorship happens when those in positions of influence see terrific work from, and potential in, an employee, so much so that they want that person to have greater opportunity to excel. Without question, these critical opportunities benefit high performers, giving them the chance to shine, gain valuable visibility, and develop skills they may not otherwise get—all of which are necessary for advancement.

Sponsorship Helps Protégés Develop Skills That Support Advancement

The leaders with whom we spoke highly valued the work opportunities their sponsors helped them secure. They viewed these positions, assignments, or projects as crucial to their career progression. In particular, they valued the skill development that came along with new work opportunities—particularly in terms of skills that supported movement to the next level. For example, one executive said of his experience:

I think of my own sponsors throughout my career. Not only have they sponsored me into a position or an opportunity or an assignment but...by doing that, they've allowed me to develop...skills that I didn't have...that have turned around and benefited me on future assignments or future management roles. And so, a sponsor doesn't just get you...the next job or the next promotion, but [also] the skills to be able to be successful....

—Man Sponsor

Sponsorship Helps Protégés Gain Visibility

Like the skill development that goes hand-in-hand with critical work opportunities, new opportunities afforded high performers visibility they may not

have had without sponsorship, which in turn led to greater opportunities. One senior leader told the following story:

Once, I was in the field organization and I was getting kind of lost....I'd had five bosses in five years, and sales manager No. 5 looked at me and said, "Oh my God, you are so talented and nobody knows who you are. Work with me. We're going to get you on the agenda at the national sales meeting. I'm going to get you to travel—the Vice President's going to travel with you," and basically, I did what he told me, and I had a major promotion nine months later.

—Woman Sponsor

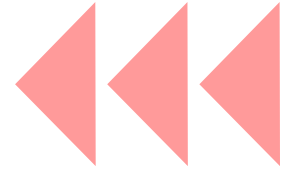
CATALYST VIEWPOINT: SPONSORSHIP OPENS THE DOOR

While sponsorship can open doors for high-performing individuals, simply providing someone with an opportunity does not guarantee success. It's up to the person being sponsored to deliver once given the opportunity. As one protégé we interviewed said:

[Sponsors] just open the doors, right? It's up to you then to walk through the door and show that you are capable of finding the path.

—Man Protégé

At its core, sponsorship is about trust. To be willing to sponsor someone, the sponsor must trust that the protégé will do a good job and make the most of the opportunities opened up to him or her.¹¹ Likewise, a protégé must trust that sponsors have his or her best interests and career goals in mind when suggesting particular opportunities.



Sponsorship is a Powerful Differentiator at the Top

The executives and high performers we interviewed nearly unanimously agreed that sponsorship relationships were important for advancement at their organizations. Moreover, they said these relationships became even more important as one strived to reach the highest levels of the company or firm. As one high performer we interviewed put it:

As you move up in the organization, at increasingly senior levels, sponsorship becomes more important because you're... competing for a fewer number of roles and advancement opportunities, and you require a broader base of support.

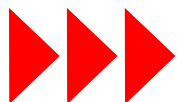
—Man Protégé

Another high performer agreed, saying:

At a more junior level, you've got every chance of progressing...by being very good at your job and doing a very good job at the interview. Once you start progressing...that pyramid has shrunk in terms of the number of jobs, and you have to have people who are advocating on your behalf to be one of the...possible candidates for that one job.

—Woman Protégée

As these protégés' experiences attest, sponsorship can be a powerful differentiator at the top, where fewer positions are available and competition is greater for those positions. Thus, while sponsorship is important throughout one's career, as one reaches the top, it becomes imperative.



Sponsorship is a Means of Overcoming Barriers for Women

There's no question that sponsorship is helpful for all high performers. However, it's especially important for women. Women's representation lags men's at the highest corporate levels,¹² and women continue to report lack of access to critical networks.¹³ Leaders with whom we spoke named these barriers when discussing why their organizations should encourage more sponsorship of women:

In most organizations...there are maybe one or two [women] at the top level...and then the rest of them are still male, and the thinking is still very male-oriented.

—Woman Sponsor

Women are still severely disadvantaged... because a lot of sponsorships...come out of just relationships....But a lot of times, men just have those relationships, right? They're buddies with someone. They work in the same [business unit]. One's the other's superior. They play golf together....One takes an interest in the other. They believe they're talented and they help....That's kind of what it's all about, and women are still disadvantaged in being in those situations, to be creating those relationships.

—Woman Sponsor

The dearth of women at the top...the only way to address that is to ensure that women...have the opportunity to be appropriately sponsored.

—Woman Sponsor

As this last quote emphasizes, sponsorship is a necessary and powerful means to overcome the barriers that women still face in reaching the highest organizational levels in meaningful numbers.



SPONSORSHIP HELPS WOMEN NAVIGATE THE DOUBLE BIND

Sponsorship also matters to women because, as research from Catalyst¹⁴ and others¹⁵ shows, women who advocate for themselves can be penalized in the workplace. Because sponsorship involves speaking up on behalf of others, it offers a solution for navigating the double bind women face.



CRITICAL FEATURES OF THE SPONSORSHIP RELATIONSHIP

TRUST, HONESTY, COMMUNICATION, COMMITMENT

To better understand what makes a sponsoring relationship work, we asked executives and high performers about the hallmarks of an effective relationship. Leaders and high performers shared with us four critical features that must be present for a sponsoring relationship to succeed: trust, honesty, open communication, and commitment.

+ TRUST

Leaders we interviewed told us that when it came to good sponsoring relationships, trust was the defining element. Moreover, trust had to be present on both sides of the relationship to make it successful, as the following quotes illustrate:

[You have to have] trust...trust and confidence that the things you're talking about will remain confidential or that the person that has the information will use it only in the right context because often, you're sharing personal feelings or you're sharing goals or aspirations that you entrust only with certain people. So you need to have that level of trust.

—Woman Protégée

There has to be trust between them...[T]he protégé is going to be vulnerable and...[if] he or she [is] really going to take advantage of what the sponsor can do, they're going to have to make themselves vulnerable and then expose some of their weaknesses, so that they can get the help and the opportunities that are appropriate for them. And...the protégé has to trust that the sponsor will not abuse that knowledge inherent in that relationship—that the sponsor will understand the weaknesses and development opportunities...and will do their best to help the protégé develop and improve and then be able to take on that next opportunity.

—Man Sponsor

+ HONESTY

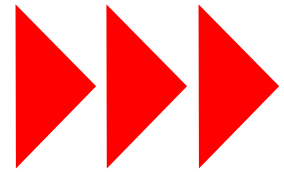
In addition to trust, leaders we interviewed said that an effective sponsoring relationship required honesty. Without it, they claimed, those being sponsored could not receive the candid feedback needed to progress within the organization.

It needs to be just a very...candid relationship. The individual being sponsored needs to have thick skin and be receptive [to] honest and candid feedback... about what they need to do and where they need to change what they're doing to get themselves to where they want to be.

—Man Protégé

I think an honest conversation [is critical]. So someone who's just not going to tell you what you want to hear; someone [who] will tell you... the good, the bad, and the ugly.

—Woman Sponsor



+ COMMUNICATION

Communication serves as a vehicle for trust and candor and was seen by sponsors and protégés as fundamental to effective relationships. According to them:

Open communication is very important—feeling free to communicate with one another in an honest and straightforward way. Trust and confidence both ways is very important. But communication I would say really is very critical in that process.

—Man Protégé

Clearly, it's got to be open....There has to be...substantially complete lines of communication. You really do need to talk to each other, be honest with each other, all along.

—Man Sponsor

+ COMMITMENT

Lastly, leaders emphasized the importance of commitment to making the sponsoring relationship work effectively. For example, one executive protégé we interviewed said:

The thing that I sort of differentiate...is that...the people who are really...a sponsor or effective [at sponsoring]...their success is really your success....They're really committed at a level of finding talent, and growing and developing that talent, and they're willing to make things happen for that talent. There are other people that certainly appreciate, develop, [and] enjoy work, but they just don't have as much skin in the game, quite honestly, as a sponsor. I've worked with very talented people in that other group, but they just never are going to go the extra mile for people to do that, and I think that ultimately impacts their followership. But that, to me, is the difference.

—Man Protégé

SPONSORSHIP PROVIDES VALUABLE FEEDBACK AND LEARNINGS—TO SPONSORS

Why should would-be sponsors invest the time? What's in it for them? Like protégés, sponsors reap their own benefits from the sponsoring relationship. In addition to increased cachet, sponsors we interviewed named two primary benefits: receiving valuable feedback and learning from their protégés, and a sense of satisfaction that arose from the active career support of others.

Sponsors Gain Information that Leads to Growth

Sponsors acknowledged that not only do they provide opportunities for protégés to move into new roles and enhance or develop skills, but that sponsors themselves gained information that helped them learn and grow in their respective careers. Many sponsors reported that having a protégé allowed them to stay in touch with what's going on in the organization at different levels and better understand the business based on the information received:

In my current case, those people are generally a few levels below me, and they open my eyes to many things going on in the organization or things that I don't get to touch day-to-day. So I learn more about the business that I don't see on a day-to-day basis, which just helps me be a more effective leader.

—Woman Sponsor

I learn from them all the time. And I think about the business, about them, different opinions, different ways of doing things. I think you always learn from people who you work closely with. So for me, it's been sometimes a good reality check on what's going on in the business in areas I don't work in or [at] different levels. It helps me keep connected with the undertones and the culture of the environment in the business.

—Woman Sponsor

[Sponsorship] just helps me stay in touch with things that are going around that I might not have visibility with. So it sheds a lot of light for me.

—Man Sponsor

Sponsors also gained valuable personal feedback and learning:

I've never had a sponsorship where I didn't learn things and pick up new skills or techniques from the individuals involved....It's clearly a two-way street. Every one of those three [protégés] I mentioned has taught—and I'm confident will continue to teach—me new things.

—Man Sponsor

I don't think anybody knows everything, and even though they might be younger people in the firm, sometimes they bring a view that's different or a different way to approach something than I might. So clearly there are times when I learn from them.

—Woman Sponsor

Protégés' Perspectives Illuminate Company Needs in Today's Business Environment

Notably, knowledge of protégés' perspectives can support diversity and inclusion in organizations by further illuminating the needs of the company in today's business climate. As two executives with whom we spoke said:

[Sponsorship] keeps refining my leadership skills and has made me even more aware of the criticality of diversity and balance and people's needs. I think that's really instructive,

especially in today's environment and getting more critical...especially as it relates to promoting diversity and advancing women and people of color in the organization.

—Man Sponsor

[Sponsorship] keeps me thinking about my own development, and it keeps me thinking about what I'm trying to achieve at [my company] from an employee perspective—like what kind of people do I believe [we] need to have to continue to grow, the right cultures, differences of opinion, different styles—it's all healthy at any organization. Not everybody needs to be cookie-cutter. It's made me more conscious of that and how important that is.

—Woman Sponsor

Sponsors Gain Personal and Professional Satisfaction

Not only did sponsors get valuable feedback as a result of their sponsoring relationships, they also reported a deep sense of satisfaction, both professionally and personally, because of the experience. Many felt that acting as a sponsor gave them “a sense of pride in seeing someone develop and grow, and progress and be successful.” As the executive quoted below articulated, sponsors feel accomplishment in knowing they have affected others' careers positively:

You obviously feel a sense of self-satisfaction, of helping people grow, advance, and get promoted and get to the next level, and a sense of accomplishment as you see their careers broaden and they become successful. I think it's above and beyond the direct, tangible business benefits; you do feel successful...by helping other people be successful.

—Man Sponsor

Likewise, other sponsors said they derived enjoyment and satisfaction from helping others reach their fullest potential, particularly when

protégés went beyond what they may have imagined for themselves:

Personally, [sponsorship is] just very satisfying. In my view, one of the real benefits I have in working with large numbers of people is to impact people and influence an outcome that potentially they never thought possible. And that to me is as inspiring as anything we do.

— Man Sponsor

I find it very satisfying to see people fulfilling their potential and to be taking on bigger [assignments]....I'm so convinced that most of us are capable of doing most anything if we just believe that we can, and I like to see myself proven right sometimes in that.

— Woman Sponsor

Clearly, sponsoring relationships offer sponsors myriad benefits. Importantly, the executives we interviewed articulated how crucial it is for leaders to be effective talent stewards. Leaders demonstrate their value as leaders by strategically developing talent. Sponsorship is one way that executives can refine their leadership skills, learn from those they are sponsoring, and build organizational awareness—all while helping to grow talent and improve the organization's performance.

CATALYST VIEWPOINT: SPONSORSHIP ENHANCES REPUTATIONAL CAPITAL

Successful sponsorship creates and builds reputational capital for the protégé *and* the sponsor. By selecting a protégé who goes on to make a greater impact in and for the organization, the sponsor enhances his or her own reputational capital as a discerning leader invested in talent sustainability. Thus, others view sponsors as powerful contributors to organizations' overall success and bottom line.



SPONSORSHIP PROVIDES DIRECT AND INDIRECT BENEFITS TO ORGANIZATIONS

Effective sponsorship—where high performers receive critical opportunities to excel and sponsors gain important feedback and learnings—benefits organizations most directly through more effective leadership, increased satisfaction and commitment among team members, and leaders’ desire to invest in the talent development of others.

Sponsorship Results in More Committed, More Effective Leaders and Teams

Sponsorship has a number of benefits for organizations that use it effectively. Not surprisingly, many of these advantages stem from the experiences of the people living out sponsoring relationships—sponsors and protégés. For these individuals, sponsorship has strong personal benefits that create positive spillover effects for the organization. Most notably, the leaders with whom we spoke agreed that having a sponsoring relationship:

- Made them want to “pay it forward.”
- Increased their job satisfaction.
- Increased their commitment to the organization.
- Influenced their desire to stay with the organization.

Additionally, sponsors noted that organizations can derive direct benefits from effective sponsoring relationships, saying that sponsorship creates better leaders and teams.

Leaders Want to Pay It Forward

First and foremost, leaders noted that having a sponsor made them want to “pay it forward” to others.

The sponsorship I’ve received has made me want to sponsor other people, so that I can contribute to them, and also knowing how it’s

impacted my loyalty and contribution...I feel that sponsoring other people will only increase their contribution.

—Man Protégé

I don’t want to stop giving back, and I don’t want to ever forget what I went through to get to where I’m at. I think it’s important that you maintain that humble view of, “Hey, I’m here, I recognize that, and I want to help others reach their full potential, whatever that is, but to help give back to others as they’re being developed as well.”

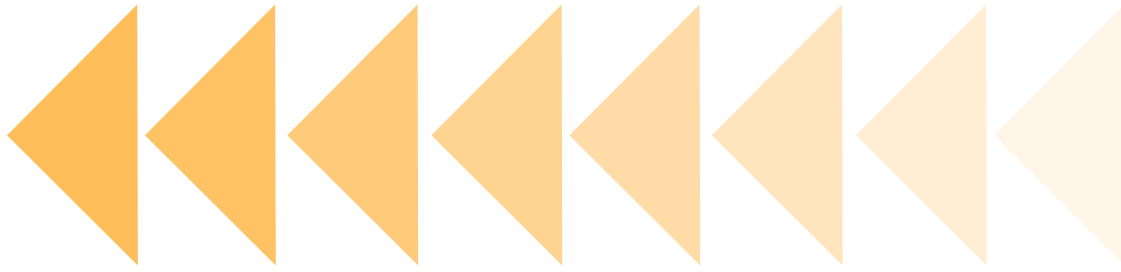
—Woman Sponsor

Sponsorship Leads to Greater Satisfaction with and Commitment to the Organization

Other leaders we interviewed talked about how having participated in a sponsoring relationship boosted their job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, and made them want to stay with their company or firm. The following quote illustrates this trend:

[Having a sponsor] absolutely kept me with the firm longer, made me feel supported. And whenever there’s times of being dissatisfied or less satisfied with working arrangements, there’s always someone I could go to, to get wise counsel....Anything I was going through, any frustrations, be it internal or client-related ...they’d been through [it] before. I could... benefit from the lessons they’d learned. So, yeah, absolutely, it kept me with the firm. It kept me motivated, because I knew there was somebody who was a very high performer themselves who valued my contribution.

—Man Sponsor



Sponsorship Builds Better Leaders and Teams

In addition to the indirect positive effects sponsorship had on their organizations, the executives with whom we spoke talked about how their organizations benefited directly from the presence of sponsoring relationships. Sponsors felt oftentimes better teams and better leaders emerged when sponsorship was in play:

I would argue that our most successful partners or the people with the best potential are the people who are sponsors. And the reason it's so is because it's a reciprocal relationship. My

sponsor, I would run through a brick wall for him because of what he does for me. That's how you build a team.

—Woman Sponsor

Sponsorship of high-performance [individuals] in order for the company to do better—because that performance can have a greater impact on the next level—is my job as a leader....I get paid to develop, nurture, and grow a leader. That's my job.

—Man Sponsor

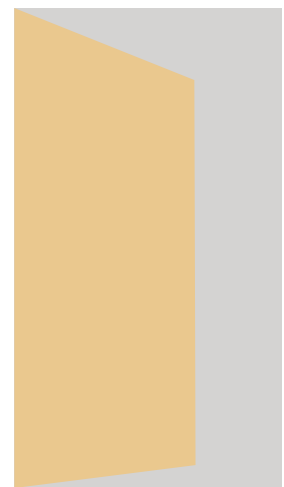
How to Find a Sponsor or Protégé

Overwhelmingly, sponsors and protégés we interviewed found one another through working together. One executive shared with us what she looks for when considering a potential protégé.

...People want you to be their sponsors. And you can't just say, "Poof! I'm your sponsor."... It has to be based on a relationship, a working relationship, observations that I see, a spark that I see in the individual to say, "Hey, I think they can do more," and I want to be able to help them to do that.

—Woman Sponsor

For more in-depth recommendations on how to initiate and build effective sponsoring relationships, see *Fostering Sponsorship Success Among High Performers and Leaders*, the companion tool to this report.



HOW TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE SPONSORSHIP THRIVES

To bridge the sponsorship gap and ensure adequate sponsorship of women and men, there are a variety of roles individual employees, as well as organizations, should play. The companion tool to this report provides recommendations for individual sponsors and high performers who are being sponsored. However, organizations play a vital role in creating an environment where sponsorship can thrive. Here we share participant insights on what organizations can do to encourage sponsorship within organizations, as well as diversity and inclusion practices from leading organizations that illustrate the power of sponsorship and well-executed leadership development programming.

Ensure Expectations Are Explicit and Transparent

Some organizations have embraced the practice of sponsorship more fully or more transparently than others. When we asked sponsors whether or not there was an expectation at their companies or firms that senior leaders would act as sponsors, most

said yes, there was. Some said this expectation was made clear through the talent management process. As one executive put it:

Absolutely [there is an expectation of sponsorship]. In fact, if I'm not acting as a sponsor, I will not get the year-end reviews that I try to get. So it is a part of the way I am judged.

– Woman Sponsor

At other organizations, the expectation existed, but it was unspoken or unwritten. Sponsors answered by saying, “We do it naturally,” or, “There’s a culture of it.”

Among those who said there was an expectation to sponsor, when asked how they learned about this “social norm,” most said they relied primarily on those they saw as sponsor role models—either people who had sponsored them or other people who were acting as sponsors.

DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS IN ACTION MCDONALD'S CORPORATION

The power of explicit expectations and transparent role modeling by leaders is demonstrated by this champion's actions:

McDonald's has promoted the development of female managers in Asian countries. Our leaders are committed to creating an environment that will leverage the talent of our female workforce in order to provide growth opportunities and become contributors to our success. I supported the establishment of the Japan Women's Leadership Network (JWLN) back in late 2007. It was my belief that we could not change Japanese culture, but we could change our corporate culture. In 2010, our first female vice president, district manager, and two directors of operations assumed their posts. We will aggressively continue to assign high-potential women to occupy responsible positions. I earnestly hope with the promotion of women that they will serve as role models for future generations of employees and contribute to the reinforcement of our organizational values.

– Eikoh Harada, Chairman, President, and CEO
McDonald's Company (Japan), Ltd.



WOMEN AND MEN PROTÉGÉS REPORTED HAVING SIMILAR NUMBERS OF SPONSORS, WITH BOTH AVERAGING BETWEEN ONE AND TWO CURRENT SPONSORS. LIKEWISE, WE FOUND LITTLE VARIATION BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN IN TERMS OF THEIR REPORTED EXPERIENCES AS SPONSORS OR PROTÉGÉS.

However, leaving employees to intuit sponsorship's existence or learn about it solely through role models can be problematic. When left to chance, there is no guarantee that the desired behavior will occur and in a way that is inclusive of those who tend to be left out of informal talent management practices—in particular, women and racially/ethnically diverse employees. Moreover, allowing leaders to rely exclusively on the example of others can backfire when sponsors don't or can't execute the practice well, as one executive shared:

There is an expectation [that leaders will act as sponsors]. The problem is, very few of them are any good at it....Not everybody's good at this stuff....[Holding] leadership positions—it could mean you got there for other reasons [besides effective talent management]. But there is an expectation people will play this role, and that each [leader] will take [it] seriously, both with the people that they work with and those that they sponsor. Just not everyone's very good at it.

—Woman Sponsor

Sponsorship Tips the Scale for Women

Sponsors and high-performing protégés alike agreed that their organizations should encourage greater sponsorship of women. As one executive put it:

I do think that women need more sponsorship... because there's a tendency for people to be less risk-taking with women or diverse candidates than they are with non-diverse. And so if the risk appears to be higher, then there needs to be more tipping of the scale. That tipping of the scale comes from sponsorship.

—Woman Sponsor



DIVERSITY & INCLUSION PRACTICE

DEUTSCHE BANK—ACCOMPLISHED TOP LEADERS ADVANCEMENT STRATEGY (ATLAS)

An organization that has made expectations of sponsorship clear through a formal program is Deutsche Bank:

Deutsche Bank's Accomplished Top Leaders Advancement Strategy (ATLAS) sponsorship program was launched in 2009 with the goal of improving the gender balance at senior levels and increasing the pool of women eligible for the most senior positions in the firm. ATLAS prepares high-performing women from all business units globally for executive leadership positions by pairing them with a member of Deutsche Bank's Group Executive Committee (GEC) from a different business line. Deutsche Bank's GEC members sponsor ATLAS women by championing them to lead the firm and advocating for them to fill senior most positions.

[Continued on the next page](#)

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION PRACTICE

DEUTSCHE BANK—ACCOMPLISHED TOP LEADERS ADVANCEMENT STRATEGY (ATLAS) (Continued from previous page)

This program is based on a strong business case. In thinking about next steps for the firm and developing a program for women to succeed globally, Deutsche Bank realized that companies employing more women in leadership positions are better able to attract and retain women employees and serve a diverse customer base. Josef Ackermann, Deutsche Bank's CEO, is the ultimate sponsor of ATLAS. To initiate women into the program, he personally sends a letter inviting them to attend an opening event and dinner with himself and the GEC, which provides high visibility for the group.

ATLAS participants include women who are already leaders at the firm but who, with the help of strategic sponsorship, have the potential to rise to even more senior, more visible positions. ATLAS women are diverse across various dimensions, including multiple ethnicities and different functions and business lines. Participants for this year-long program are identified and selected via a rigorous nomination process, typically a half- or full-day session held with Deutsche Bank's Global Head of Diversity, and region and business heads. The nomination committee comprising senior-level women and men from across the firm reviews each nominee's career history and aspirations, leadership qualifications, and future career goals.

ATLAS helps instill a strong sense of ownership in one's career. Participants learn that they must take risks and develop clear goals in order to advance at Deutsche Bank specifically and in their careers in general. ATLAS' structured nature and clear business goals ensure that the program is strategically aligned within the firm's "social aspects" work and includes the following elements:

- **In-depth assessment:** Throughout the course of the program, ATLAS women undergo various assessments to help them and their sponsors identify specific goals and areas on which the pair should focus. Examples include gaining broader industry exposure and raising visibility. A career consultant is also assigned to each participant to assist with the assessment process.
- **Regular meetings:** Several times over the course of the year, ATLAS women are brought together to meet as a group. In addition to a kick-off session, these meetings focus on a variety of strategic topics, including the difference between management and leadership and the board of directors' decision-making process.
- **Group session:** Once per year, the entire ATLAS cohort (all past and current participants) meets in a joint session to network with and learn from one another. For example, one group session focused on building strategic networks. To prepare, ATLAS women examined their own networks to determine how strategic they are—that is, to what extent the network helps achieve career goals and how effective it is at bringing other Deutsche Bank women up through the ranks. The sessions also encourage participants to challenge men and managers in lower positions to give more thought to women's career aspirations.

To ensure that ATLAS women are giving back to the broader community of women at the firm, Deutsche Bank assigns ATLAS participants as informal mentors to new women managing directors (MDs). This strategic alignment between executive leadership sponsoring and informal mentoring at the management level underscores the firm's commitment to women's leadership and employee development.

ATLAS has had a positive impact on participating women and their sponsors. The program provides high-potential women with heightened visibility and contact with influential Deutsche Bank leaders, which, in turn, increases the women's competency and confidence. Across the entire ATLAS cohort group, 45 percent of women participating are now in new or expanded roles.



DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS IN ACTION


CH2MHILL—SPONSORING WOMEN INTO CRITICAL ROLES

CH2M HILL is an organization with leaders who put their values into action where sponsorship is concerned:

Bill Dehn, Executive Vice President, understands the power of sponsorship. As former head of North American Operations for engineering and construction firm CH2M HILL, Bill knew what it took to be successful at the organization. As a vocal champion for women's advancement, Bill used—and continues to use—his influence to make sure that women received the critical experiences they needed to advance. With the support and participation of senior leaders at CH2M HILL, the company made a conscious decision to develop high-potential women more quickly by valuing potential over seniority in awarding critical assignments and job opportunities.

One beneficiary of this decision was Elisa Speranza, President of the firm's Operations and Maintenance Business Group, a largely blue-collar 2,100-person business. Some people were not convinced that a woman could run the group, given the male-dominated, primarily blue-collar nature of the business. But Bill believed in the capabilities of many of the company's women—they just needed a chance to compete for open positions. To that end, Bill led the establishment of a policy that required that all job openings at mid-level management and above include a woman in the candidate pool. Elisa and another female candidate were in the pool for the initial interviews with the decision-makers—and through the full process, they chose Elisa.

As Bill recalled it: "That's a case where some thought you shouldn't bother to put a woman in the candidate pool, but we did, and it worked....If you get women considered, you accelerate the process of their advancement. It tells women you can leapfrog men if you are qualified and get a chance to be considered. It shows if you are more open to the candidacy and you let talent win out, you'll get women."



Leaders felt the key to making effective sponsorship happen was educating people about sponsorship and building awareness about the practice to help create a dialogue:

Just asking the questions in a way that helps you think about [it]...[Asking] “Who are the ones that you’re sponsoring?” I don’t think anyone’s ever asked me that question. Just the fact that I’m going to get asked the question, I better be thinking about, and if someone says, “Yeah, but these three guys look just like you.” How are you helping to change the culture and the structure of the organization if you’re only creating opportunities for people who look just like you?...So show me where you’re not just mentoring, you’re coaching. You’re actually sponsoring somebody that is out of the mold.

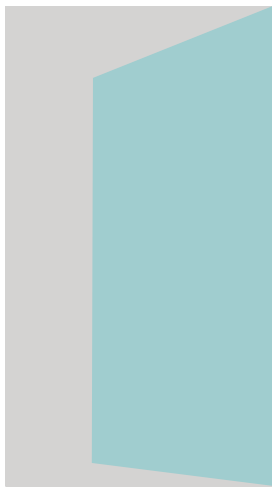
–Man Sponsor

As this leader implied, there can be great benefit to linking sponsorship to talent management systems, through succession planning or with explicit ties to performance reviews:

You almost need some sort of formal key performance indicator for the guys who are at the executive level...to say, “You are the top 15 or 20 decision-makers for this firm, and each of you has a responsibility to sponsor two or three women across your area.” ...I think often, it’s not a conscious exclusion from their thinking, but it’s an unconscious human bias that we promote people in business who are like us.

So when you’re a white Anglo-Saxon male, you gravitate toward doing business with and providing [opportunities to] white Anglo-Saxon men—even if there is a pool of talented women right outside your door...Formalizing that relationship potentially through a sponsorship arrangement might actually start to cut through some of that thinking and might force a greater conscious awareness of the untapped talent pool that is there.

–Woman Sponsor





DIVERSITY & INCLUSION PRACTICE

CITI—WOMEN LEADING CITI

Citi has implemented a formal program tied to organizational goals around talent.

The firm's overarching initiative, The Citi Women's Initiative, has been in place since 2006, when leaders from 20 women's councils and four women's employee networks came together to form one entity. To expand efforts globally, CEO Vikram Pandit appointed two senior women executives as co-heads of the newly branded "Global Women's Initiative" in 2008. In 2009, the global initiative was renamed Women4Citi and expanded to include the newly designed, Women Leading Citi program. Women Leading Citi is a firm-wide, targeted effort to support high-performance women participants who possess the potential to move into senior leadership at Citi. This effort fosters sponsorship relationships between high-potential women, globally, and senior "advocates," who can be women or men executives.

The 18-month program pilot was launched in November 2009 after Citi reviewed extensive research that showed how women at all levels are less likely to have sponsors at different points in their careers. For Women Leading Citi, the firm purposely chose to target women at the managing director level—often considered one of the most critical levels of leadership in financial services—because individuals would still have opportunities to attain higher levels of management and expand profit and loss responsibility.

Program goals include:

- Exposing women participants to others in senior management.
- Broadening senior women's visibility.
- Providing career development and enhanced leadership skills.
- Supporting firm-wide efforts around talent and mobility.





CONCLUSION

Sponsorship matters. It matters for advancement to higher levels—and clearly for women—when greater pressure exists on making the “right” choice from among a pool of extremely talented individuals. It matters to sponsors—who get benefits from the relationship, including valuable feedback from protégés about not only themselves, but also the organization and the state of business. And it matters to the organization—from the positive effects of increased employee performance, job satisfaction, and retention to creating a culture of

talent sustainability and fostering a “pay it forward” attitude within the workforce.

After all, true leaders demonstrate their value as leaders by strategically developing an organization’s talent. Sponsorship is something good leaders do. Done well, as the evidence from those in sponsoring relationships makes clear, sponsorship is a powerful tool that can propel employees and organizations to even greater success.

ENDNOTES

1. Catalyst, *Women in U.S. Corporate Leadership: 2003* (2003); Christine Silva, Monica Dyer, and Lilly Whitham, *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Critical Relationships* (2007); Heather Foust-Cummings, Laura Sabattini, and Nancy Carter, *Women in Technology: Maximizing Talent, Minimizing Barriers* (Catalyst, 2008).
2. Nancy M. Carter and Christine Silva, *Mentoring: Necessary But Insufficient for Advancement* (Catalyst, 2010).
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4. “Guest Post: Setting Up Success,” Catalyzing, <http://www.catalyst.org/blog/guest-blog/guest-post-setting-up-success>; “Be Somebody—Get Sponsored,” Catalyzing, <http://www.catalyst.org/blog/sponsorship/be-somebody-get-sponsored>; “Sarah Palin, Indra Nooyi Can Agree on This: Sylvia Ann Hewlett,” Bloomberg, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-12-03/sarah-palin-indra-nooyi-agree-on-this-commentary-by-sylvia-ann-hewlett.html>.
5. The benefits of mentoring have been detailed thoroughly and include: personal support, role modeling and friendship: Judith Worell, *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender: Sex Similarities and Differences and the Impact of Society on Gender*, L-Z Vol. 2 (London, UK: Academic Press, 2002); increased organizational commitment: Belle Rose Ragins, John L. Cotton, and Janice S. Miller, “Marginal Mentoring: The Effects of Type of Mentor, Quality of Relationship, and Program Design on Work and Career Attitudes,” *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 43, no. 6 (December 2000): p. 1177-1194; reduced turnover intentions: Terri A. Scandura and Ralph E. Viator, “Mentoring in Public Accounting Firms: An Analysis of Mentor-Protégé Relationships, Mentorship Functions, and Protégé Turnover Intentions,” *Accounting, Organizations & Society*, vol. 19, no. 8 (November 1994): p. 717-734; increased promotion opportunities: Terri A. Scandura, “Mentorship and Career Mobility: An Empirical Investigation,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 13, no. 2 (March 1992): p. 169-174; and decreased stress: Sarah Coles, “Build a Better Boss,” *Employee Benefits* (December 2001): p. 37-38. Much of the literature has conceived of sponsorship as a sub-function of mentoring. For an exception, see Earnest Friday, Shawnta S. Friday, and Anna L. Green, “A Reconceptualization of Mentoring and Sponsoring,” *Management Decision*, vol. 42, no. 5 (2004): pp. 628-644. See also Joanna Barsh and Susie Cranston, *How Remarkable Women Lead* (New York: Crown Business, 2009): pp. 165-173.
6. Herminia Ibarra, Nancy M. Carter, and Christine Silva, “Why Men Still Get More Promotions Than Women,” *Harvard Business Review* (September 2010): pp. 80-85.
7. Carter and Silva.
8. Carter and Silva, p. 5.
9. Catalyst interviewed a total of 93 leaders, 36 percent of whom were women sponsors, 26 percent of whom were men sponsors, 23 percent of whom were women protégés, and 15 percent of whom were men protégés. Executives and high performers were identified by key contacts at Catalyst member organizations, or organizations with whom Catalyst has a relationship. Thus, the sample is a “convenience” sample. Executives and high performers were based in Asia, Australia, Canada, Europe, South America, and the United States. All interviews were analyzed for themes, with the most common themes among responses being presented in the report.
10. When we spoke to participants about the differences between mentoring and sponsorship, respondents described mentoring as being a broader developmental relationship where they receive a wide range of advice and coaching across several areas of their career. Interviewees also mentioned that mentors provide the type of advice on which a sponsor is not typically focused, given the sponsor’s main goals of advocating and recommending protégés for positions or opportunities.
11. For diverse women, ensuring that trust exists in professional relationships—especially where power dynamics are at play—has been shown to be challenging. Because trust is such an important aspect of sponsorship relationships, this dynamic could prove problematic for both protégés and sponsors. Additionally, sponsors may experience increased visibility when sponsoring an individual from a minority group. See Katherine Giscombe, *Building Trust Between Managers and Diverse Women Direct Reports* (Catalyst, 2011) and Belle Rose Ragins, “Diversified Mentoring Relationships in Organizations: A Power Perspective,” *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 22, no. 2 (April 1997): p. 482-521.
12. Catalyst, *2010 Catalyst Census: Fortune 500 Women Executive Officers and Top Earners* (2010); Catalyst, *2010 Catalyst Census, Financial Post 500 Women Senior Officers and Top Earners*, (2011).
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14. Catalyst, *The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don’t* (2007).
15. See, for example, Hannah Riley Bowles, Linda Babcock, and Lei Lai, “Social Incentives for Gender Differences in the Propensity to Initiate Negotiations: Sometimes It Does Hurt to Ask.” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 103.1 (May 2007): pp. 84-103.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is the result of the teamwork and dedication of many on the Catalyst staff and colleagues outside the organization. Nancy M. Carter, Ph.D., Senior Vice President, Research, provided leadership in the development of the research project and report. Heather Foust-Cummings, Ph.D., Senior Director, Research, and Sarah Dinolfo, Director, Research, conceptualized and executed the study, and authored the report, along with Jennifer Kohler, Director, Advisory Services. Catalyst President & Chief Executive Officer Ilene H. Lang contributed insights and support that were critical to the report's development.

We are grateful to Kerrie Peraino, American Express Company, Barbara Adachi, Deloitte LLP, and Wendy Berk, Deloitte LLP, who provided insights and contributed to the study design. We are also grateful to Catalyst issue experts and team members for their input and contributions in producing this

report, including: Michael J. Chamberlain; Jan Combopiano; Katherine Giscombe, Ph.D.; Eleanor Tabi Haller-Jorden; Aimee Horowitz; Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, Ph.D.; Candice Morgan; Liz Mulligan-Ferry; Susan Nierenberg; Julie Nugent; Emily Pomeroy; Jeanine Prime, Ph.D.; Laura Sabattini, Ph.D.; Christine Silva; and Deborah M. Soon. Emily Cohen, Emily V. Troiano, and Cheryl Yanek in Catalyst's Information Center provided valuable research support. John Chang provided technical assistance.

Nancy Hendryx, Editor, Research, edited the report. Sarah Qualls, Designer, designed the report and its cover with support from Sonia Nikolic, Art Director. Katherine Giscombe, Ph.D., fact-checked the report.

We extend a special thanks to our Executive Circle sponsors: American Express Company and Deloitte LLP.

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