



Mentoring Is Not Enough, Women Need Sponsors

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Want to achieve gender parity in your organization? Learn why sponsorship, more than mentoring, is the critical differentiator in helping talented, motivated women advance.

Early in my career, I had a terrific boss. She identified assignments for me, provided the foundational information I needed to be successful in my role, and then stood back and let me go. While I knew I could always go back to her for clarification or help in overcoming roadblocks, I also knew she expected me to get the job done. And I did. I responded to her confidence and learned a lot. She was a great mentor.

But she was not a sponsor. Never once did she and I have a conversation about my career or long-term professional goals. She did not talk me up to senior leaders in the organization, or coach me on how to position myself for higher levels of responsibility. She helped me become more adept at performing in my existing role, but her assistance stopped there. From her, I learned how to complete an assignment with flying colors but, unfortunately, also got the idea that such dedicated “beavering” alone would eventually open doors for me.

Back then, I didn’t recognize what I didn’t have. Today, I know better. Sponsorship is a critical factor in helping talented, motivated individuals advance in the business world - and women in particular desperately need this type of support. Despite increased recognition of the disparity between men and women in senior roles, the percentage of women still stands at a scant 24 percent globally.

One reason is that women tend to be over-mentored and under-sponsored, as our recent white paper *Women, We Have A Problem* points out. Many women find value in seeking input and feedback - mentoring - from a loose coalition of professional peers, friends, and family. Building these relationships seems to come naturally to most women. However, men tend to have more finely developed instincts on how to zero in on a few influential individuals - sponsors - who will help them get ahead.

Unfortunately, mentoring and sponsoring are frequently confused. At Right Management, we've long preached the value of developing talent in three focused areas: Education, Experience, and Exposure. This also can be a useful paradigm for distinguishing a mentoring relationship from a true sponsorship.

Education is about developing subject matter expertise - the heart of the mentoring relationship. A mentor helps you become better at analyzing problems, drawing conclusions, and communicating your solutions within the scope of your job.

Experience is about gaining first-hand knowledge of business issues within your field and across other areas - and can be a component of both mentorships and sponsorships.

Exposure is the driving force behind a sponsorship. From an exposure perspective, a sponsor will open doors for you by:

- Introducing you to influential power-brokers within the organization
- Recommending and backing you for major initiatives that enable you to gain greater visibility across the organization
- Coaching you on how to elevate your game - from communications skills to personal interactions - to succeed at higher levels
- And, most importantly, putting his or her reputation on the line by publicly identifying you as their protégé

As one expert put it: "A mentor will talk with you, but a sponsor will talk about you."

The need is great. Right Management found that eight out of ten women report difficulty in finding sponsors within their organizations. That may stem in part from many women believing, as I once did, that doing quality work alone is the key that turns the tumblers to the executive boardroom. On the other hand, most organizations are not even close to fulfilling their end of the bargain. For example, only one in five women reports having ongoing career conversations with her manager. Such discussions should be mandatory for all employees and represent the critical first rung on the ladder to helping women advance their skills and standing within the organization.

It wasn't until I joined ManpowerGroup and had the good fortune of gaining a strong sponsor that I truly understood the far reaching benefits of such a relationship. It's the professional equivalent of "tough love" - not always easy to take but able to effect profound changes. My experience has made me a strong advocate for sponsorships, and I encourage women to move beyond the comfort of their mentoring networks and be more overt in their quest for sponsors. Also, senior leaders, both men and women, need to be more attuned and willing to put their organizational "capital" on the line to help the next generation of talented women leaders succeed.

About Right Management

We are global career experts. Established in 1980, we have over 35 years of experience in career management and talent strategy. In that time, we've put 40,000 people to work every day, conducted over 12 million interviews per year and successfully transitioned more than three million people into new roles.

Right Management is the global career expert within ManpowerGroup (NYSE: MAN), providing tailored global workforce solutions that identify, develop and transition talent to optimize business performance. As career experts, we enable companies to win by helping employees build successful careers in the Human Age.

We drive better outcomes through our expertise in organizational effectiveness, career management and individual development. Right Management has offices in more than 50 countries and partners with companies of all sizes, including more than 80 percent of the Fortune 500.

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