



Exploring the Next Evolution of Mentorship

“Sponsorship” is a leadership development tool that drives innovation, fuels talent development, and creates diverse organizations.

A Collection of Articles by Audrey J. Murrell and Mike Fucci



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Sponsorship: Evolution in leadership calls for innovation in thinking

By Audrey J. Murrell and Mike Fucci

You are cruising along in a stellar career.

You've worked in the same division of your current organization for 15 years, exceeding expectations, moving up the ladder, and taking copious notes on the successful habits of those above you.

All signs point to an eventual appointment to a leadership position. It might be two years. It might be five. But you're confident you're doing everything in your power to eventually lead the organization you've helped shape.

Then one day you get a phone call.

"How would you feel about a two-year deployment in Japan? You'd be doing something completely different, and you'd be filling a gap in your skillset. I know you have your heart set on a leadership role, and I think this deployment could not only help with that goal, but open up the door for other senior leader roles. It's a big challenge, but I think you'd be great!"

This is the kind of call you'd receive from a sponsor.

A sponsor is typically a senior leader or influential individual who identifies strong performers, guides them on their career path, and advocates on their behalf for leadership positions across the enterprise. Sponsorship generally drives positive career outcomes and provides needed support for individuals throughout their various career stages. However, sponsorship alone cannot provide the range of diverse mentoring needs or functions that an individual will need throughout his or her career.

Sponsors are important to the success of organizations like Deloitte LLP and are integral to the career development of students at universities such as the University of Pittsburgh as they prepare to become future business leaders.

Sponsorship is an attractive human resources tool for organizations in need of different kinds of leaders—especially diverse leaders. A meaningful sponsorship can foster an appreciation for the diversity of thought, skills, and experiences that are critical for individual leadership development. It can also expand the pool of qualified leadership candidates because it takes a more horizontal approach to finding leadership candidates, something which is vital for organizational effectiveness.

Our research shows that there is great demand for formal sponsorship programs. Part of the issue is that the traditional vertical pipeline of talent management in organizations often cannot keep pace with the demand for cultivating leaders who can lead diverse teams and collaborate across networks.

In Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends 2016 report, which generated more than 7,000 responses from business executives in 130 countries, 89 percent of respondents rated the need to strengthen, reengineer, and improve organizational leadership as an important priority. More than half of surveyed executives said their organizations are not ready to meet leadership needs. And only 7 percent said they have accelerated leadership programs for millennials.

Formal sponsorship programs can be an answer to these issues. The forthcoming book, "Mentoring Diverse Leaders: Creating Change for People, Processes, and Paradigms," reviewed the substantial body of research and best practices on effective mentoring strategies that drive success and support leadership development within global organizations. The authors found it imperative that organizations redefine sponsorship as a tool for cultivating diverse leaders, and they explored the idea of peer networks as a powerful and untapped source of sponsorship, support and influence.

We believe sponsorship programs and achieving organizational diversity go hand-in-hand. For example, early in his career, Mike established a process to find candidates for key positions in Deloitte Consulting LLP. For each position, he asked his team for four names: one considered vertical or "next in line"; one considered horizontal, or outside of the division of the open position; one minority; and one female. He found that this approach forced a different conversation about succession. Its impact was twofold: the pool of candidates widened, and the diversity of thought and experience increased. Both factors were important in creating effective leadership more quickly. Likewise, the sponsorship that was offered by knowledgeable, supportive and influential peers was critical to the success that Audrey has experienced throughout her career.

We talk with many executives and senior-level alumni in the marketplace. They often agree that a more diverse organization typically attracts high-performing talent and leads to better performance. A recent study reinforced the notion that inclusion can improve business performance and drive innovation, customer service, collaboration, and engagement and that mentoring has a positive impact on diversity initiatives.

Sponsorship can lead professionals to situations and places outside of their comfort zone—maybe even Japan. The experiences and skills transmitted via meaningful sponsorship should assist in setting their organizations and themselves up for future success.

Sponsorship: A powerful career accelerator for diverse talent

By Audrey J. Murrell and Mike Fucci

This is part two of a three-part series on sponsorship as a force for fueling innovation in leadership development. In this article, co-authors Mike Fucci, Chairman of the Board of Deloitte LLP, and Audrey Murrell, associate dean of the University of Pittsburgh's College of Business Administration, discuss sponsorship from the perspective of the sponsoree.

As busy professionals, we're often consumed by the task at hand. With our nose to the grindstone, we don't look up to see the possible senior leadership role five to 10 years down the road. We don't take the time to expand our network, forgoing opportunities to strengthen relationships with influential decision-makers. Assignments that could fill a gap in our skillset often just aren't on our radar.

In essence, we neglect to nurture our careers.

That's where a sponsor comes in.

A sponsor—a senior leader or influential individual with a broad understanding of the organization—can help high-performing professionals assess their strengths and blind spots, and can advocate on their behalf to put them in positions to develop more fully as a leader.

In Part 1 of our series, we discussed the value of sponsorship from an organization's perspective. But what does it mean to the professional being sponsored? In an effective sponsorship, the sponsoree hopefully gets a trusted, long-term relationship with a senior leader or key influencer within the organization who has a wealth of knowledge about the organization and the industry. The sponsoree can tap into this knowledge to calibrate a career path and fine-tune goals for specific positions.

Sponsorship is a leadership development mechanism designed to offer a sponsoree many career benefits, including: opportunities to expand their network; exposure to executives enterprise-wide; insight into the organization's culture; a clear understanding of the expectations associated with the pathway to leadership; and the backing of a senior leader or key influencer for an elevated and critically important role in the organization.

Through our experiences in the corporate world and in higher education, we have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of sponsorship on individuals' careers. We know it opens their eyes to experiences they have not considered and can expand the individual's social network. This is both the beauty and the power of sponsorship.

Most professionals think they know what their next job should be. Chances are, they are thinking vertically. Sponsorship lets them

see in all directions. A sponsor can look both vertically and horizontally in an organization, which uncovers more options and opportunities for the sponsoree. A sponsor can also provide critical feedback on how to best prepare for and take advantage of these opportunities.

Studies show that sponsorship can be a turbo charger for careers. According to a recent Deloitte report, individuals who have the active support of sponsors within their organization are more likely to advance in their careers. Moreover, sponsorship can improve the chances of more stretch assignments, more promotions, and pay raises by up to 30 percent, according to the report.

Some of the work by Audrey Murrell has shown that the impact of sponsorship is especially important for supporting diversity and inclusion efforts within an organization. An innovative approach called inter-organizational formal mentoring shows that facilitating sponsorship relationships as a component of formal mentoring programs is an essential element of diverse talent pipeline development. The connection between sponsorship and diversity has also been shown to exist through research and practice activities by Catalyst, Inc. Sponsorship as part of formal mentoring programs is an essential element of developing diverse talent and future leadership within the organization.

Based on the feedback we get from students and professionals who have experienced a sponsorship, we know it's a priceless relationship. Invariably, it creates a more versatile, knowledgeable, and satisfied professional who's poised to lead.

At its core, sponsorship is about relationships. It's a bond built on confidence and trust. It depends on the exchange of knowledge and sharing of networks. Because sponsors put their reputation on the line, they need to be confident the sponsoree has the potential to grow and the drive to excel. And because sponsorees don't know what they don't know, they need to trust their sponsors to help guide them on their professional path. It's a give and take, and is well worth the effort.

If you're ready to accelerate your career, tap into the power of sponsorship. Look for organizations that invest in diverse pipeline development by including sponsorship as part of their formal efforts. It can accelerate your career development and prepare you to step into that next level of leadership. It can also help your organization develop a strong pipeline of diverse leaders who can add value for years to come.

Sponsorship: A purpose-driven approach

By Audrey J. Murrell and Mike Fucci

Editor's note: This is Part 3 of a three-part series on sponsorship as a force for fueling innovation in leadership development. In this article, co-authors Mike Fucci, Chairman of the Board of Deloitte LLP, and Audrey Murrell, associate dean of the University of Pittsburgh's College of Business Administration, discuss sponsorship from the perspective of the sponsor.

As you advance in your career, it is natural to look beyond your own situation and on to the impact you have (or could have) on the talent pipeline of the organization. Your experience, knowledge and relationships are invaluable for you—imagine what they would mean to others attempting to advance their careers.

We believe the best tool for sharing the knowledge and experience you have gained is sponsorship. Sponsorship is a leadership development approach in which a senior leader (or network of influential individuals) both guides a professional on a career path and advocates on his or her behalf for key opportunities or leadership positions.

How does a sponsorship relationship start? The responsibility typically falls on the more experienced person, executive, or senior leader. These leaders look across the enterprise to identify high performers and start the sponsorship conversation. Regardless of how a sponsorship relationship begins, it is critical that both parties are active participants since both can benefit from an effective relationship.

In her research, Audrey Murrell has documented examples of formal sponsorship programs in the corporate environment. Some of the most effective programs are more than just leadership development. They also transmit knowledge from influential innovators to inspire the next generation of change creators.

Effective sponsorship can also enhance succession planning, leadership development, talent management, and diversity. Sponsorship can create opportunities for growth and development. It can open the aperture of the conversation and can make it more likely for the sponsoree to consider options they might have otherwise overlooked.

And, ideally, effective sponsorship can also help you. Doing great work can be fulfilling, but doing great work and setting others up for success can take “fulfilling” to another level. In sponsorship, executives have an opportunity to add to their legacy. Sponsors take an active role in building a diverse pipeline of leaders, which is essential to many organizations’ growth and success. As a sponsor, you can also ensure that the work you have done as a leader within the organization continues through the next generations of leaders or innovators you support and sponsor.

As we mentioned in Part 1 of this series, diversity and sponsorship can go hand-in-hand, and diversity can play a critical role in the sponsor’s selection process. We encourage sponsors to support professionals who have different experiences and perspectives, for this will likely enhance the impact of sponsorship. A relationship between two people with diverse backgrounds, thoughts, and skillsets can lead to more versatile professionals and new ideas.

In Part 2 of this series, we examined sponsorship from the vantage point of the sponsoree. The benefits can be many: opportunities to expand one’s network, exposure to executives enterprise-wide, insight into an organization’s culture, and laying the groundwork for the pathway to leadership. Furthermore, sponsorship is a clear signal that one has received the backing of a senior leader or key influencer who has that person in mind for future growth in the organization.

For executives looking to add value on a different level, sponsorship can be a purpose-driven, legacy-building answer. Sponsors have a vested interest in helping sponsorees to be successful and may even have a performance metric tied to effective sponsorship, providing greater incentive to move the needle on diversity, leadership development, and organizational change. What better way to build long-lasting capacity within the organization, as well as put the finishing touches on your career, than helping to ensure the success of those who will follow you through the ranks of leadership by becoming an effective sponsor.

Tips For Being an Effective Sponsor

We recognize not everyone knows how to be an effective sponsor, so based on training provided at Deloitte and research conducted by Associate Dean Murrell, here are some highlights of what we have learned about effective sponsorship. Effective sponsorship involves:

- Being empathetic and receptive to the sponsoree’s needs and experiences (which may differ from your own)
- Helping a sponsoree clarify his or her own career concerns and aspirations to determine the best fit for new opportunities or positions
- Cultivating trust by showing mutual respect, maintaining confidentiality, and providing honest feedback
- Maintaining a coaching style that uses active listening, insightful questioning, and mutual agreement while keeping in mind that you as the sponsor don’t have all the answers
- Leveraging opportunities and being an advocate for the sponsoree in ways that provide support based on their needs and aspirations
- Being conscious of unconscious personal biases that may have an impact on developing an effective relationship