

Sponsors: How do you cultivate a sponsor?

Networks are made up of three levels: peers, mentors and sponsors. Peers are like minded individuals who share similar goals, abilities or aspirations. Mentors, as we learned in February's CUP Career Corner, can be formal or explicit relationships for the purpose of advice and insight. Sponsors on the other hand, are your champions, individuals – often senior themselves - that influence decision makers in order to benefit your career. Simply put, mentorship prepares you for career transition and sponsorship makes it happen.

[A recent study](#) by the Center for Talent Innovation on the lack of diversity in senior management suggests that many senior leaders who rise within corporations have been picked by a sponsor.

So, how do you cultivate a sponsor?

**Do your job well.** Sponsors often risk their own political capital and credibility by recommending a protégé. Therefore, this investment must be spent wisely. Sponsors have to trust that you can live up to their expectations, often based entirely upon past performance. Doing your job well is the first and most important step in letting others know you're ready for new challenges.

**Build Strategic Relationships.** You will not always know who your sponsor is, so build your relationships wisely and make sure key decision makers are aware of your contributions. Sponsorship often begins with mentorship and when that mentor becomes a key influencer of others in your career, they become a sponsor. Often, the protégée is unaware of any closed door conversations where the sponsor is "pounding the table" on his or her behalf. It's a good rule of thumb that **you don't often choose sponsors, they choose you.**

**Be visible, be available and make it known.** It's important for sponsors to know where you want to grow. As you build a sponsor-protégée relationship, make your goals and aspirations known, request to be staffed to an assignment, ask for guidance and be ready to provide them with information on how you can be of some assistance. Do so with humility and gratitude, and do not underestimate the power of a handwritten "thank you" note.

**Next month look forward to information on how to build a personal board of advisors...**

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