



# How mentors and sponsors differ

BY NICOLE BYRES

In recognition of the importance of mentorship and sponsorship to the advancement of women into leadership roles, **The Vancouver Board of Trade's Women's Leadership Circle** chose this topic for its Morning Leader series event on Sept. 24.

Formal and informal mentoring has existed for many years; sponsorship on the other hand is a relatively new term, and very different than mentorship. Thus, it is useful to clarify the differences between a mentor and a sponsor, and how sponsorship is a key strategy in ensuring women achieve senior leadership positions within an organisation.

Mentors provide advice, support and guidance, but their role is usually passive. Mentors are valuable sources of information and can be a sounding board to assist mentees on a wide range of issues from developing career paths, to dealing with co-workers or managers with different or challenging styles. Importantly, mentors can assist their mentees to understand the "unwritten rules" of their organisation.

Sponsors on the other hand advocate on behalf of their protégés, and they often have a vested interest in ensuring that their protégés succeed. Sponsors open doors and advocate on behalf of their protégés to help get them 'stretch' assignments or a role on high-visibility teams or files



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thereby enabling them to demonstrate their skills and ability.

**Sylvia Hewlett**, author of *Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor*, and Co-Director of the Women's Leadership Program at **Columbia Business School** conducted a two-year study which sampled 12,000 men and women in white-collar occupations across the U.S. and Britain. According to her research, sponsorship made a measurable difference in career progression, particularly in the areas of high-profile assignments, promotions, and pay.

Hewlett's research found that sponsorship was particularly helpful to women who aspired to climb higher than middle management. However, organisations

seeking to increase the representation of women in their senior management ranks had to be intentional about ensuring high potential women are provided with sponsorship opportunities, without which, women would not necessarily get the sponsors they required.

This is because the sponsor-protégé relationship also affects the sponsor's credibility and recognition, and so sponsors – typically senior white men – naturally choose people most like them to sponsor. As a result, organisations may need to be more proactive in both identifying high potential women leaders, and then matching such women with sponsors who are able to

make a difference in their career progression.

## Tips for optimising mentor-mentee and sponsor-protégé relationships

I have been a mentor to many women over the years. One of the key indicators of an effective and mutually rewarding mentor-mentee experience has to do with the selection of the mentor. Mentees who are strategic in their choice of mentor, by matching the mentor to the mentee's particular needs at that stage in her career, get the most out of the relationship. These mentees are focused on their objectives, and respectful of their mentors' time.

and beyond those with whom they share a similar style or background.

Sponsors should have the power to advance one's career and to provide assistance in obtaining high profile assignments and/or promotions. Once such a person has agreed to be a sponsor, it is important that the protégé delivers outstanding performance and loyalty to the sponsor, so that the relationship also reflects well on the sponsor.

Despite the title of her book, Hewlett confirms that both mentors and sponsors are important. Sponsors however, make the difference in ensuring that women achieve senior leadership roles.

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In turn, these mentors feel their time and experience is valued, will often go the extra mile for that mentee.

When choosing a potential sponsor, it is also important to be strategic but the search criteria is different. Women looking for sponsors to assist them in their aspirations for advancement, need to be prepared to look outside of their immediate circle of managers or mentors,

Organisations that take a proactive approach to create sponsorship opportunities for high potential women, have a better chance of achieving diverse leadership teams.

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# Are you a reluctant collaborator?

BY LISA MARTIN

I want you to ask yourself, "How collaborative am I, *really*?"

Competition is so ingrained that it can be hard to let it go — even with your colleagues.

As a leader, you need to know when to let a collaborative perspective take over.

Read the following seven statements and think about your interactions with colleagues. How true is each one for you?

1) Given my level of responsibility and performance, I

deserve a lot of the credit when I'm involved in a big win.

2) When things go wrong, it's important for me to communicate where others fell short.

3) I sometimes make promises I don't intend to keep.

4) I'm sometimes reluctant to share information.

5) I'm sometimes reluctant to share resources.

6) I think cross-team collaboration can be more trouble than it's worth.

7) I prefer to focus on the success of my own team and let others win or lose on their

own terms.

If any of these statements feel even just a bit true for you, take heed. You don't need to dampen your competitive spirit, but you'd be wise to use it more strategically.

Collaborative cultures don't happen by accident. They're led by people who know when it's appropriate to set ego aside and be the ultimate team player.

I'll leave you with one final personal query to ponder.

Leading Question: Is your ego in the way of better collaboration?

Lisa Martin has made it her mission to help companies keep and cultivate rising leaders. She is a member of The Vancouver Board of Trade Women's Leadership Circle Advisory Council, the creator of the *Lead + Live Better™* programs, a leadership coach, speaker, and a bestselling author. In the coming months, Martin will share a series of articles in *Sounding Board* about maximizing performance as an executive, to help further the WLC's mandate to elevate women in business. For more info, visit [LisaMartinInternational.com/programs](http://LisaMartinInternational.com/programs).



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