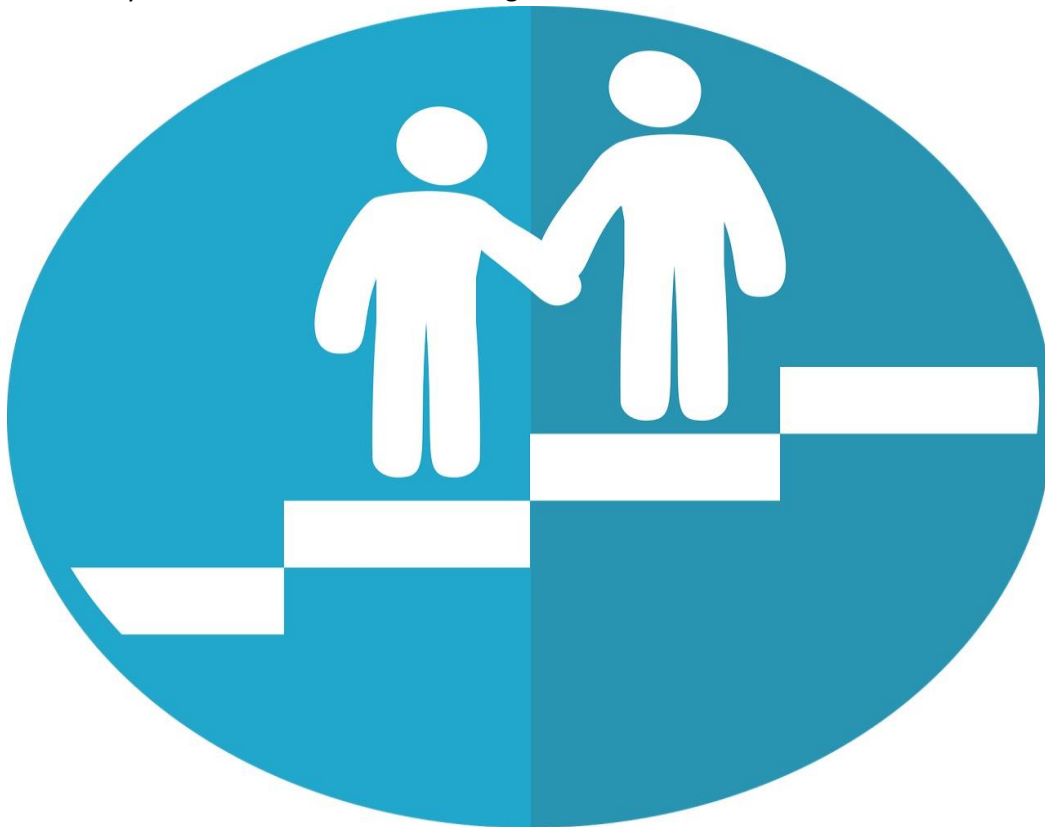


MANAGING SPONSORSHIP RELATIONSHIP

Seven steps to building effective sponsorship relationships

We know that having a sponsor makes a big difference to your career, but did you know that being a sponsor is just as important? Sponsorship not only contributes to a leader's ability to leave a lasting legacy but, says economist and author Sylvia Ann Hewlett, also improves your chances of promotion

All leaders need a protégé: someone who can increase their bandwidth, have their back and provide a substantial value add. But it's not just a nice-to-have. Senior managers with protégés are 53% more likely to have received a promotion while middle-level managers with protégés are 1.6 times more likely to have received a stretch assignment.



According to economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett, author of [*The Sponsor Effect: How to be a better leader by investing in others*](#), sponsorship is a professional relationship in which an established or rising leader identifies and chooses an outstanding junior talent, develops that person's career and reaps significant rewards for these efforts. Sounds like mentorship? Well yes, but, says Hewlett, it is much deeper and more rewarding, requiring commitment and investment by both sponsor and protégé rather than just 'paying it forward' by grooming someone to rise higher.

In other words, it is a longer term and more reciprocal relationship. The sponsor believes in, and takes a bet on, the more junior star. They advocate for the next promotion and provide 'air cover' to take the risks that success often demands. Meanwhile, the protégé is a high-achieving employee who, at a minimum, outperforms (or as Hewlett says, "contributes 110%"), is trustworthy and loyal and contributes added value. And the protégé needs to take an active role: 70% of the relationship building should be done by that person.

Hewlett's research supports the value of sponsorship on the protégé's career. Male employees with a sponsor are 23% more likely to progress up the ladder than those without while female employees with a sponsor are 19% more likely to progress. However, her research finds that men are 46% more likely to have a sponsor than women while Caucasians are 63% more likely than people of other ethnicities.

For sponsors the rewards are equally beneficial. Among the managers and executives surveyed by Hewlett, 39% of those with a protégé are satisfied with their professional legacy, as opposed to 25% of those without.

However, most self-identified sponsors are not doing a great job at it, says Hewlett. "They are leaving significant value on the table."

1. **So what should you be doing to be more effective? Here are Hewlett's seven steps: **Identify potential protégés****
Know what to look for in the talent you're considering sponsoring, starting with performance and loyalty
2. **Include diverse perspectives**
Find those who are different from you – in their mindset and viewpoints, or in their gender, age, ethnicity, experience or background
3. **Inspire for performance and loyalty**
Ensure that your protégés' values align with yours, and use their ambitions to spur the forward
4. **Instruct to fill skills gaps**
Work with your protégés to develop where they need to grow, whether that's in knowledge or soft skills
5. **Inspect your prospects**
Keep an eye on your protégés to ensure that they're continuing to deliver in performance and, most importantly, loyalty
6. **Instigate a deal**
Know when to make the ask, specifying the details of your relationship with your protégés
7. **Invest in three ways**
Work on your protégés' behalf by endorsing them, advocating for them and providing air cover when they need it

Sponsorship is an investment that starts paying out benefits early. But there are some common mistakes to avoid. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of breakdowns in the sponsorship relationship hinge on lack of loyalty resulting from a failure to 'inspect' and vet the protégé, while only 23% of sponsors look for a protégé who has attributes and skills they do not have,

instead preferring a 'mini-me'. Meanwhile there is a failure to sponsor protégés of a different gender – 40% of men fear gossip and lawsuits in this #MeToo era, says Hewlett.

If done well, sponsorship will enable you to rise higher than you might otherwise have gone and will help you leave a legacy. Wherever you sit in the organisation, it is good to have a trusted protégé to take over the reins when you move. Not only is that good for the organisation and you, but it is also extremely rewarding.

As Hewlett says: "For any rising or established leader it's best to have three such junior stars to maximise your agency and impact. Your protégés should benefit enormously from the investments you make in them – and so should the enterprise. And you have the satisfaction of knowing that you've helped deserving younger talent rise to the top."

How do you maintain relationships with sponsors?

Five Ways to Build a Better Relationship with Your Sponsor

1. Communicate Your Expectations. ...
2. Create & Maintain That Close Working Relationship. ...
3. Maintain Transparent Communication. ...
4. Get to Know Sponsors' Target Markets. ...
5. Meet Sponsor Expectations.

Do Your Research

As you build your sponsorship program, it is crucial to research your prospective partners. If you are an arts organization that is soliciting a company committed to feeding the homeless, you will be wasting your time and theirs. So take the time to find potential partners that generally support your cause.

Relationship Development

When meeting with a potential sponsor, the first thing to ask is what their corporate goals are for the year. Remember that while you are hoping to secure funding for your organization, companies have annual goals and objectives that they are trying to reach. If you can identify what that company is committed to, you can better identify how helping your nonprofit can help them achieve both your goals AND theirs. If supporting your organization can help a company achieve their goals, you have found an ideal candidate for a long-term partnership.

Relationship Maintenance

We hear all too often from corporate sponsors that ‘nonprofits only reach out to us when they want money.’ It is important to think of sponsorship work in terms of relationship development. This means that you need to develop a plan for year-round contact with your partners: Share success stories quarterly or monthly, send out holiday cards, share articles or events with your contacts, and just check-in with them periodically throughout the year. Time can pass quickly, so take the time to map out what your communication plan is for the year and stick to it.

What Is In It for the Sponsor?

Often, nonprofit staff can be so determined to secure more money for programming and events that they forget to focus on how their corporate partner benefits from the relationship. Businesses of all sizes have to plan strategically about where to spend their marketing dollars, so it is important to think about what is in it for them before you land the meeting and make your pitch. **Streamline the Ask – show options, offer a variety of options**

We often talk to nonprofits that have multiple events per year. They prepare forms for each event and send out each form individually over the course of the year. But when possible, it is best to outline your event calendar for the year and share all of the possible options with your partner at one time.

Sponsors often tell us that they constantly receive requests – even after they have just given. So when submitting your events individually, and you send out an ask for a lower level project (i.e. sponsor a bowling lane for \$250) instead of asking for the annual gala (\$1,000, \$2,000 or \$5,000), you might be limiting what your partner will choose to sponsor.

Deliver as Promised

Now that you have secured the sponsor, it is vital to properly execute on the agreement that has been made. Not fulfilling sponsorship expectations is the surest way to lose corporate support, and it is far easier to renew a happy sponsor than it is to seek out new sponsors year after year.

Maintain Timely Communications

With a sponsor or a potential sponsor, timely communications are crucial. We often joke that you have to communicate the way that you would want to be communicated with: Don’t leave people hanging out there wondering if you received their email for days or, worse yet, weeks. Provide prompt replies to sponsor communications and it will go a long way in strengthening the relationships you are trying to build.

Show the Impact

Sponsors like to know that their support means something, so it is important to let them know the impact accomplished from the event or program that they sponsored. How many children were able to participate in the program? How many meals were provided to the homeless? How many mental health patients received therapy? This follow-up allows corporate partners to become more connected to your cause, which will hopefully help them become an advocate for your cause in the long run.

Express Gratitude

Last, but not least, don’t forget to say thank you! It may seem obvious, but when talking to sponsors, we are surprised how many times a sponsor tells us that they never heard from an organization after an event was over. Nonprofit teams may be tired or crazy busy after an event, so sometimes the

idea of a thank you note is there but just not executed. But as part of your ongoing relationship development, this simple gesture is one of the most important in maintaining an existing relationship, so make the time!