

Ten Key Themes: **Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor** by Sylvia Ann Hewlett

Hewlett breaks down sponsorship in a practical way and shows what one needs to do to build your sponsorship network. Sponsorship, defined: “A sponsor, as we shall explore, is also someone who takes an interest in you and your career, but not out of altruism or like-mindedness. A sponsor sees furthering your career as an important investment in his or her own career, organization, or vision.”

1. Sponsorship Is Not Mentorship: Mentors provide guidance and advice, while sponsors actively invest in their protégés by advocating for their promotions, providing visibility, and offering career-defining opportunities. Sponsorship is a mutually beneficial relationship.

2. Sponsorship Is Transactional: Unlike mentorship, which is often altruistic, sponsorship is a strategic alliance. Sponsors invest in high-potential talent because it benefits their own careers, organizations, and legacies.

3. Protégés Must Deliver Results: To attract and retain a sponsor, protégés must consistently perform at a high level, provide unique value, and prove their reliability. They must contribute something their sponsor lacks, such as diversity of thought, technical expertise, or access to key networks.

4. Choosing the Right Sponsor: The best sponsors are senior leaders with power and influence who stand to gain from the protégé's success. Protégés should not just choose sponsors they admire but rather those who can elevate their careers.

5. The 2+1 Rule: Professionals should cultivate at least three sponsors: two within their organization (one in their direct line of sight, another in a different department) and one external sponsor. This diversification helps mitigate risks and expands career opportunities.

6. Visibility Is Essential: Sponsors help protégés gain visibility, but protégés must also position themselves to be noticed. This includes speaking up in meetings, taking on high-impact projects, and expanding their network beyond their immediate team.

7. Sponsors Provide Tough Feedback: Unlike mentors, sponsors offer candid and sometimes harsh feedback because their own reputation is on the line. This unfiltered guidance helps protégés refine their executive presence and leadership skills.

8. Building a Personal Brand Matters: Protégés must develop a distinct personal brand that sets them apart. This could be their leadership style, expertise in a niche area, or their ability to navigate complex organizational dynamics.

9. Strategic Relationship Management: Sponsorship requires ongoing effort; protégés must nurture these relationships by proving their loyalty, delivering results, and staying aligned with their sponsor's priorities. This also means knowing when to say “yes” to the right opportunities.

10. Barriers to Sponsorship for Women and Minorities: Women and people of color often struggle to find sponsors because they align with mentors rather than powerful sponsors. They must be strategic about networking and aligning themselves with individuals who can influence their career trajectories.