



# Mentoring and Sponsoring

The importance of nurturing talent in the modern workplace

BY FRED EASTON, JR., PLS, SR/WA

Mentoring and sponsoring are two halves of the same coin that, if understood correctly, can help us to understand how to maintain our mentors when our careers paths take a turn.

In today's fast-paced and competitive professional landscape, the concepts of mentoring and sponsoring have gained prominent lip service as effective strategies for nurturing talent and advancing careers while lagging in actual implementation<sup>1</sup>. While both mentoring and sponsoring involve senior professionals guiding and supporting junior colleagues, they serve different purposes and have distinct impacts on career development. It's important to understand the difference between the two.

## Mentoring: A Path to Personal Growth and Development

Mentoring is a relationship in which an experienced individual provides guidance, advice and support to a less-experienced person, known as the mentee. The primary focus of mentoring is personal and professional growth. Here are some key aspects of mentoring:

1. **Knowledge Sharing:** Mentors share their knowledge, expertise and insights with mentees. They offer guidance on skill development, career planning and problem-solving.
2. **Goal Setting:** Mentoring helps mentees set clear career goals and objectives. Mentors provide constructive feedback and help mentees track their progress.
3. **Personal Development:** Beyond professional skills, mentoring often addresses personal development. Mentors may offer advice on work-life balance, communication skills and leadership qualities.
4. **Long-term Relationship:** Mentoring relationships tend to be more enduring and less transactional. They are built on trust and a genuine interest in the mentee's success.
5. **Informal:** Mentoring can be a more informal and flexible process, allowing for a deeper exploration of the mentee's needs and aspirations.
6. **Unconstrained:** Mentor/mentee relationships can be between any individuals and are unconstrained by the employee/ employer relationship. Additionally, more than one relationship can coexist at any given time.

Successful mentoring focuses on the relationship between the individuals, the mentor's desire to share wisdom, gain new perspectives and enhance leadership skills. The mentee benefits by not repeating mistakes, receiving expert knowledge and expanding contacts. Both parties desire for increased happiness and a sense of purpose.



## Sponsoring: A Catalyst for Career Advancement

Sponsoring, on the other hand, is a proactive form of advocacy in which a senior leader, typically within an organization, actively promotes and champions the career advancement of a junior professional. Unlike mentoring, sponsoring is not about providing guidance or advice; instead, it is about creating opportunities and removing barriers for the protégé. Here are some key aspects of sponsoring:

- 1. Career Advancement:** Sponsors use their influence and network to open doors for their protégés, ensuring they have access to challenging assignments, promotions and visibility within the organization.
- 2. High Visibility:** Sponsoring involves publicly endorsing and vouching for the protégé's skills and potential, which can lead to greater recognition and opportunities.
- 3. Networking:** Sponsors introduce their protégés to influential individuals within and outside the organization, facilitating valuable connections and exposure.
- 4. Short-term Focus:** Sponsoring relationships are often more goal-oriented and may have a specific timeframe or purpose.
- 5. Formal Arrangement:** Sponsorship is typically a more structured and strategic commitment, with the sponsor actively advocating for the protégé's advancement.
- 6. Complementary Roles in Career Development**

Mentoring and sponsoring are not mutually exclusive; they can complement each other to create powerful career growth. Consider a scenario in which an established professional helps a young professional develop essential skills and knowledge while advocating for that young professional and introducing them to their extensive network of clients, coworkers and professional association peers.

Often within our organizations, there are people who serve as both mentors and sponsors. This is inevitable in the modern world, and it's important to understand that while you may need

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Members pledge to assist the Association in carrying out its responsibilities to the public and users of professional right of way services by exchanging information and experience within the Association and with other associations and professional organizations.



to disconnect a sponsoring relationship when changing career paths or transitioning jobs, mentoring relationships can still be maintained, even between competitors.

It's this cooperation within the Association which first drew me to a deeper participation within the International Right of Way Association, the intent of which is further codified within our Code of Ethics.

In the dynamic landscape of modern workplaces, mentoring and sponsoring are invaluable tools for nurturing talent and fostering career growth. While mentoring focuses on personal and professional development, sponsoring is a strategic approach to advancing one's career and for corporations to finding and backfilling talent gaps. When used in tandem, these two approaches can create a powerful synergy, propelling individuals toward greater success and helping organizations retain and develop their top talent. Whether you're a mentor, sponsor or mentee, recognizing the distinct roles and benefits of these relationships can contribute significantly to your professional journey while helping to maintain beneficial professional relationships.

We might not be the ones to build the bridges we acquire land for, but we don't have to be the ones to burn relationship bridges either! 🙌

<sup>1</sup> While 92% of Fortune 500 companies report having a mentoring program according to Forbes, only 40% of employees in a recent Gallup poll reported having engaged mentors and only 23% report having a sponsor.