

Different *Is* Better

(at least when it comes to mentoring)



Mentoring vs. Sponsorship: What's the Difference?

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Experts' Responses »

"I like to tell people in the firm that [if] you have a sponsor, that sponsor is acting as your champion in your career, not just as your role model."

— Maria Castañón Moats, chief diversity officer, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Forward-thinking companies have thrown out the traditional assumption that in mentoring, people learn best from similar individuals.

By Deanna Hartley

Maria Castañón Moats joined professional services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) nearly 20 years ago and worked her way up to the chief diversity officer role. But that may not have happened without help from partners at the firm who served as her mentors — none of whom looked like her or had a similar background.

“I did not have a Mexican-American woman partner as my sponsor and champion as I came up [in] the firm, nor did I sit around and wait for that,” she said.

Most of the influential mentors in her past were white males.

“Those are the people [who said] ‘I’ve always thought that you would be terrific as a lead partner on this client, and let’s talk about how we can make that happen,’” she said.

Early in her career, Moats — whose Mexican-American heritage instilled in her a deep sense of family — said she thought she’d have to leave the firm to care for her sick father who lived in a different city. But her mentor wouldn’t hear of it.

“He helped me see what I couldn’t see,” she said. “I thought I was done with the firm because I had to be with my family, [but he said] ‘I fully understand that, but I can help you.’”

Now, Moats is a vocal advocate for diverse mentoring and sponsorship relationships. “If we do more of sponsoring people that are not part of our familiar networks, we’ll make great strides in diversifying the leadership of the firm,” she said.

Moats is in a mentoring relationship with a 20-something-year-old employee. A traditional mentoring structure would assume she is mentoring the up-and-comer, but Moats is part of a reverse mentoring program where her younger counterpart helps her maximize her use of technology.

Moats said she wants to create a culture at PwC where that type of relationship isn’t strange, but one in which anyone can learn from anyone else — regardless of age, ethnicity, background or gender.

“It’s not just about meeting someone and trying to understand and find similarities; it’s really [about] meeting someone and understanding our differences, and then saying, ‘How can we leverage those differences to better our relationship?’” she said. “It’s a team dynamic.”

Diverse Relationships Yield Growth

Diverse mentoring relationships also are encouraged at MassMutual, an insurance, retirement and financial services company. For instance, of the 30 pairs participating in its Partners Program for key talent, which launched last fall, 80 percent of matches are either cross-gender or cross-race, and 100 percent of matches are cross-departmental.

“The person in the program is actually having exposure to someone in a completely different department, broadening their perspective, broadening their knowledge of the company,” said Lorie Valle-Yañez, vice president, chief diversity officer at MassMutual. “That is another diversity dimension that really helps to drive unique learning and could open up doors and opportunities.”

While this program is reserved for top talent, MassMutual

On the Web

Do you think there is a difference between mentoring and sponsorship? Tell us at network.diversity-executive.com/forum/topics/mentoring-vs-sponsorship.

“Mentoring is an innate process that humans use naturally to transfer understanding — whether it’s a cognitive understanding or whether it’s physical aptitude — it’s sharing technique, know-how. Sponsorship is a methodology that’s used primarily as a means to identify emerging leaders and then connect them with power brokers or those people who have a lot of influence inside the organization who can help make sure they get the proper range of experiences in order to advance.”

— Randy Emelo, president and CEO, Triple Creek.

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Mentoring vs. Sponsorship: What's the Difference?

Readers' Responses » Via Twitter

@DarrenToronto: #Mentoring = offering guidance/advice; #Sponsorship = active advocacy to drive progress of another's career.

@mikepeters23: Mentors can provide guidance, advice & can be at any level. Sponsors can pound the table & speak on your behalf. U need both!

Readers' Responses » Via LinkedIn

James Beeler: "While serving in the military, we required someone to sponsor new personnel when they arrived. This person usually came from within their division. The plan was to have someone to show them the 'ropes,' guide them through the check-in process and provide general 'been there, done that' information to help avoid pitfalls for the new person. Usually, that bond remained, but from this arrangement others were allowed to both influence and mentor the new arrival. Even senior personnel had someone to sponsor them through check-in and introductions. I see mentoring as a longer-term relationship as opposed to introduction."

Joe Steele: "Mentoring is coaching from a trusted adviser providing more technical and/or social skills needed in one's development. Sponsoring is having someone behind closed doors actively supporting one's career development."

Susan Colantuono: "The historic record on the topic shows that sponsorship was an essential component of informal mentoring. Now, with formal mentoring programs and forced matching, that element has been watered down; thus the introduction of sponsorship as something separate and apart."

Readers' Responses »

Via the Diversity-Executive.com Network

Rey Carr: "While a mentor may be a cheerleader for an individual during their interaction, a sponsor takes this further and acts as a cheerleader for a person during his or her interactions with others. Mentors typically refrain from making recommendations to others about someone they are mentoring and instead discuss with the person they are mentoring what might be the best ways that person can make the most use of resources to advance their own career. A sponsor, on the other hand, may take many active steps to speak on behalf of someone else to help them advance their career." «

piloted another program called Open Mentoring last summer — with an expected companywide launch this spring — to broaden access to mentoring opportunities.

"Because it's based on competencies, it's going to tell you your strongest match based on the person who has the knowledge to help you with that regardless of what their background is," Valle-Yañez said. "It could be somebody who's a peer; it could be somebody who's [at a] lower level than you in the organization who happens to be a whiz at the competency you're looking for help in."

Though both programs originated in the diversity and inclusion area, they have since been turned over to the company's Talent Practices group and are administered as ongoing human resources programs, which indicates MassMutual's efforts to integrate diversity across the organization.

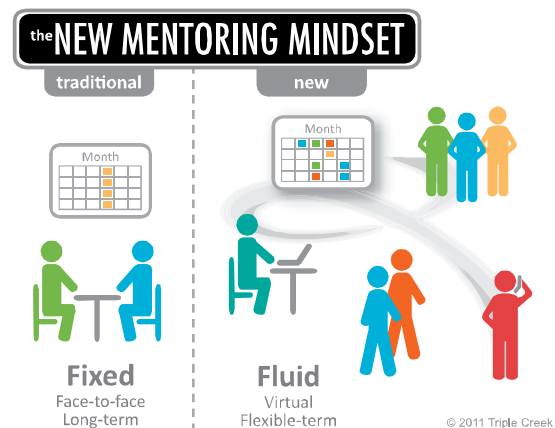
Mentoring Today

Nearly every facet of work has gone virtual these days, and one prominent trend in the mentoring space has followed suit.

"The problem is there are less localized resources than ever. Most of the rich resources in the organization are not going to be co-located with you, so [mentoring is] absolutely going virtual," said Randy Emelo, president and CEO of mentoring software company Triple Creek.

Virtual mentoring typically produces more immediate results than traditional mentoring.

"[People expected] these relationships to produce for them over time, whereas today — especially when you speak from a generational perspective, that doesn't fit into younger workers' worldview," he said. "It's much too slow for them, so they will only engage in these types of knowledge-sharing relationships if they can get something out of it immediately."



Organizations that aren't using technology to facilitate mentoring might be missing out.

"Mentoring has gone cross-gender, cross-organizational boundaries like geography, function, discipline and across the hierarchy; people are connecting primarily at the peer

“I did not have a Mexican-American woman partner being my sponsor and champion as I came up [in] the firm, nor did I sit around and wait for that.”

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level or they're connecting with wherever the knowledge is coming from,” Emelo said.

Further, desired knowledge can come from unexpected sources. Twenty-five to 30 years ago, knowledge was almost exclusively passed down from the higher echelons. Emelo said now entry-level employees are contributing significantly, inverting the knowledge pyramid in organizations, which once showed that critical knowledge emerged from the top layer of the enterprise, not at the root.

This recent trend has sparked interest in reverse mentoring and peer-based mentoring, which basically take hierarchy out of the knowledge-sharing equation.

This type of reverse mentoring happens organically in Open Mentoring — Triple Creek's mentoring system, which creates and manages connections — because the automated system connects mentees with mentors who have the experience they seek, regardless of where they fall in the organizational hierarchy.

Laying the Groundwork for Success

Prior to embarking on mentoring relationships, Craig Perrin, director of product development at workforce consultancy AchieveGlobal, outlined best practices for organizations to consider:

- **Create heterogeneous pairs.** Forming mentoring relationships with individuals of the same gender, ethnicity or who have the same experiences can restrict opportunities for growth.

“If I'm an engineer, I might work with somebody who has a different job category, other type of career goals; I don't have to work with somebody who holds the type of job I'd like to have in the future. To the extent that we can mix that up, that's the catalyst for real learning,” he said.

- **Challenge stereotypes.** There are many stereotypes floating around, and entering into a mentoring relationship enables participants to challenge those stereotypes and be authentic, which can open their eyes to learning opportunities.

“If I have a young female African-American person I'm mentoring and that person is saying, ‘You've never had the experiences I've had; you've never suffered as much as I have’ and that comes through in some way, I can say, ‘I certainly haven't suffered in the way that you have, but I have other kinds of [experiences],’ so let's challenge these stereotypes going both ways,” he said.

- **Find common ground.** Even though the mentoring pair may involve individuals from different backgrounds, it's important for them to find common ground and to connect on a human level, Perrin said. With that in mind, both participants should feel free to ask respectful questions of one another.

- **Find talents in the mentee.** Mentors should strive to find out as much as they can about their mentees. Questions can encompass their interests, career aspirations, whether they're interested in learning about a different job category within the company and what their underutilized talents are. Responses to these types of questions will provide a gauge of how to move forward, Perrin said.

Finally, one of the most potent ingredients in a successful mentoring or sponsorship relationship is authenticity, Moats said. Without that, the relationship lacks a foundation.

Part of her advice to sponsors of individuals who are different than themselves is: “First start to get to know them, because if the relationships aren't authentic, if they're not based on trust, then you're not going to connect,” she said. “We tell both sides: ‘Now you have to do all the hard work, and it's just to get to know each other.’”

At MassMutual, learning to navigate mentoring relationships with dissimilar participants is essential, which is why the company provides training on how to be an effective mentor or mentee.

“Sometimes you think you're just going to throw people together and it's going to work out,” Valle-Yañez said. “I tell people, ‘Get ready to be uncomfortable — it may be uncomfortable for the first few meetings, but understand at the end the richness of your dialogue, what you could potentially learn from one another, is so much greater than if you are paired with someone very similar.’”

Training for the Partners Program is ongoing — even the CEO participates — and Valle-Yañez said she expects to have customized training for participants in the Open Mentoring program. This could, for example, include a lunch-and-learn instructional-type meeting to provide interested employees with details on how to fill out their profiles and enter the mentoring pool.

“Helping [employees] understand the benefits of being paired with someone very different from [themselves], what [they] can gain, and helping them manage through those uncomfortable times [is key],” she said. «