How to find sponsors who’ll accelerate your career

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for All Women
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Meeting agenda

approx 80 mins

Member updates 15 mins

Watch video 8 mins

Icebreaker 10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Identifying sponsors vs. mentors 25 mins
- Activity 2: Offer help to get help 20 mins

One Action 5 mins
Member updates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time for updates</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<td>2 mins or less per member</td>
<td>8 mins</td>
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Go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It’s OK not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

Watch video 8 mins

Icebreaker 15 mins

Take a few minutes to think about the following questions. Then, go around the room and share your answers (1 minute each).

- Has mentorship helped you in your career? If so, how?
- Has sponsorship helped you in your career? If so, how?

“I still remember when I came to the U.S., looking for that first opportunity. I was looking for someone to give me a chance. I found this woman who had just launched her coaching firm. I approached her and I said, ‘Just give me a chance. I want to help.’ And she believed in me. She gave me that chance.”

Laura Espriu, director of HR, digital media company, Lean In Network Leader, Washington, USA (she/her)
As we’ve just heard, sponsorship plays an important role in any employee’s advancement. Sponsorship is even more critical for women, as advocacy from sponsors can help overcome gender bias in the workplace. But sponsors often get confused with mentors. Mentors talk to you—they give you advice and help you develop your skills. Sponsors talk about you to others. They champion your talents and encourage people to give you opportunities.

In pairs, take 15 minutes to make one list of potential or current mentors inside or outside your organization and make another list of potential or current sponsors inside or outside your organization. After writing down your lists, discuss with your partner, keeping the following questions in mind:

1. How did you identify who was a potential or current mentor vs. sponsor?
2. Do you see opportunities to convert any current mentors into sponsors?
3. Is it important to you that your sponsor is also a woman? Are there any other identities it’s important that your sponsor shares?

“My organization created a director of DEI position. Long story short, I was appointed to the role. My manager lobbied for me at the highest levels. Her advocacy helped transform my vision into a reality. We developed our relationship over time, and she came to believe that I had a vision and talents and aspirations that were in alignment with hers.”

Kathryn Edwards, Ph.D., retired director, city government and tech industry, California, USA (she/her)
Perhaps more important than identifying sponsors is making a plan for doing outreach and nurturing those potential relationships. One of the best ways to highlight your skills and value is to offer help. Approach a potential sponsor and suggest concrete ways you could contribute to their work, such as doing background research for a project. Better yet, just jump in and start helping, if you can do so in a non-intrusive way.

In smaller groups, plan an initial step you may be able to take to increase the number of sponsors you have on your side. Then, discuss your strategies together and consider questions like, what is the lowest-touch way you could reach out to a potential sponsor? What about high-touch strategies? What are the biggest challenges that could come up in converting potential sponsors into sponsors effectively?

“I’ve found advocates by asking for something I want that will help both me and the company. For instance, when we’re working on a presentation, I’ll ask if I can deliver the bulk of it. The worst thing they can say is ‘no.’”

Sarah Lands Ramrup, senior lead, consumer goods industry, Missouri, USA (she/her)
One Action

This week, take 2 minutes to commit to either:

- Reaching out to a potential sponsor to offer help as an initial step in fostering the relationship
- Reaching out to a current sponsor with a specific request to help you in your career

Commit to making that initial outreach and share the experience with the Circle the next time you meet.

Congratulations on a great meeting!