



Mentors and Sponsors

Brilliant careers are built on both

Checklist

1. Every engineer needs a mentor to grow and develop. Think of a mentor as a coach. They pass on career and life lessons. Things that work, things that don't. They impart frameworks for thinking about and resolving dilemmas and career crossroads. They become trusted sounding boards when you need to "kick the can down the road" with someone. If you haven't got one, get one.
2. Truly successful careers, though, require more than mentors. Mentors are necessary but not sufficient. Brilliant careers always have what are called "sponsors." People spend a lot of time talking about mentoring but rarely ever mention sponsorship. Ironically, it's sponsors that will have the biggest single impact on your career and how far you progress. If you haven't got one, get one. But they're just not as easy to find as mentors. You have to look hard and be patient – and, in the meantime, perform.
3. The difference between a mentor and a sponsor comes down to doors. A mentor can usually show you one and even lead you to it. A sponsor is the person that can open it for you. Sometimes they're the same person but not always. For your career to flourish, you need to pass through lots of doors. Someone has to open them for you. That's what sponsors do.
4. A sponsor will generally be someone of great influence in your company or professional circle that has been impressed by your achievements and behaviours over a period of time. To find a sponsor, you need to consistently perform a high level. To find a mentor, you don't. A sponsor will then recommend you to others for career advancement or special opportunities.
5. Let your work speak for itself. Shameless self-promotion without the qualifications, achievements or humility to back it up will rarely attract sponsors even if you have mentors. Hubris is not the way to get sponsors to come out of hiding.
6. Sponsors may remain anonymous and you may not even know they are acting on your behalf. They often work discretely and in the shadows. Because you don't know who might sponsor you and open doors for you, consistent high performance is essential. It is the one sure fire way to attract sponsorship.
7. You can't afford to let sponsors down. This is crucial. Mentors generally don't know if you've let them down or ignored their advice. Letting a sponsor down can be career limiting. If a door has been opened for you and you decide to pass through it, you will need to perform. Your reputation and the sponsor's depend on it. If you let a sponsor down, they are highly unlikely to sponsor you again and will likely warn other potential sponsors off. The price of failure is extremely high in the sponsorship stakes.
8. Just because a sponsor opens a door for you does not mean you need to pass through it. Carefully evaluate every opportunity. Seek guidance and take counsel. If the opportunity is not the right one for you, after careful consideration, respectfully decline. Sponsors will accept no for an answer. They are not so forgiving if you charge through the door they've opened for you and you then stuff things up or damage relationships.
9. Mentors don't need to be repaid. Sponsors do. You need to work doubly hard when an opportunity is presented to you and validate the sponsor's faith in you.
10. Sponsorship has a multiplier effect. If you perform and reward the sponsor's faith, they will tell probably other potential sponsors about you and that will open new doors and so on. Sponsors live in a world of power and influence and can grant you access to people and career opportunities you would never otherwise know about. They need to be treated with respect and rewarded with high performance.