



Catalyst Study Shows Sponsorship is Key to Women's Success

NEW YORK (August 17, 2011)—For women especially, it takes more than meeting expectations to get noticed in today's workplace. Female employees who work hard and play by the rules are often overlooked when it comes to plum assignments and big promotions. According to *Sponsoring Women to Success*, the latest in Catalyst's groundbreaking series of reports on women and sponsorship, effective sponsorship is critical to accelerating a woman's career—from getting her noticed by senior-level executives to being considered for her company's top jobs.

Key findings of this report include:

Sponsorship matters, especially to women. "Good sponsors can supercharge a woman's career by providing her with access to essential networks, bringing her achievements to the attention of senior-level executives, and recommending her for key assignments," said Ilene H. Lang, President & CEO of Catalyst. "Effective sponsors also provide career coaching and guidance that enable protégés to make broader and more strategic contributions to their organizations."

Previous research shows that women can be penalized for exhibiting self-promoting behavior considered acceptable in men but unappealing in women. Because good sponsors recognize and reward talented employees by speaking up on their behalf, sponsorship can help high-performing female employees subvert this double bind.

Sponsorship benefits sponsors, protégés and organizations. A protégé's career is clearly enhanced by a good relationship with a sponsor. But sponsors benefit too—by establishing reputations as discerning leaders invested in talent sustainability, as powerful contributors to their organization's success, by learning from employees at every level, and gaining leadership skills that can further enhance their own careers. Sponsors also reported a sense of satisfaction from actively supporting the careers of their most promising employees. Sponsorship benefits companies by creating more effective and committed teams and fostering a "pay it forward" mentality that makes employees feel valued and supported.

Senior-level executives must recognize sponsorship as a necessary component of good leadership. Executives should understand what good sponsorship entails and how to use their influence to advance high-performing employees' careers, be vocal advocates for their protégés, and build a foundation of support that will ensure their protégés' continued success in the organization. Executives can become sponsors by paying attention to high-performing employees at all levels of an organization, including those who may often go unnoticed.

There is no "silver bullet" for attracting the attention of a high-level sponsor. *Sponsoring Women to Success* reveals that sponsorship is earned. To attract sponsors, employees need to make their skills, strengths, and work known to colleagues as well as senior leaders. They must build reputations as flexible, collegial professionals who are consistently committed to their own career development.

Smart companies create environments where sponsorship thrives. Companies must explicitly and transparently communicate an expectation of sponsorship to their executives. "At Catalyst, we believe that sponsorship is something good leaders do," noted Ms. Lang. "Companies that educate their employees about sponsorship, link it to talent management systems, and make it a hallmark of organizational strategy will reap tremendous rewards."



Successful sponsorship is a win/win/win. Everyone wins when employees make their talents visible to executives, when executives truly invest in high-performing talent, and when companies foster an expectation and an environment in which sponsorship can flourish:

- High-performing employees, particularly women, gain critical, career-accelerating experiences and advancement opportunities.
- Sponsors receive valuable feedback from protégés and build reputational capital as leaders committed to building a robust pipeline of talent.
- Organizations increase employee engagement, retention, talent development, and the strength of the talent pipeline.

A companion tool to this report, *Fostering Sponsorship Success Among High Performers and Leaders*, offers additional information on how high-performing employees can attract sponsorship, and how senior leaders can become effective sponsors.

American Express Company and Deloitte LLP were the Executive Circle Sponsors of *Sponsoring Women to Success*.

To learn more, visit www.catalyst.org. For media inquiries, please contact Ariane Tremblay at 514-861-1330 ext. 226, atremblay@girafe-communications.com; or Susan Nierenberg at 646-388-7744, snierenberg@catalyst.org.

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