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Senior Leaders are Misunderstanding the Role of Sponsorship—and Missing Out on its Rewards, According to New Research by the Center for Talent Innovation

NEW YORK, January 8, 2019—Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) has found, time and again, that sponsorship or senior-level advocacy in the workplace produces career dividends for protégés and for their sponsors. Yet CTI’s latest study shows that many who see themselves as sponsors are not performing the duties that are essential to these relationships. Of the nearly one in four employees who identify as sponsors, only 27 percent advocate for their protégé’s promotion—the core purpose of sponsorship. In addition, 71 percent of sponsors say their primary protégé is the same race or gender as they are. *Sponsor Dividend* showcases the vantage point of the sponsor, and equips would-be sponsors with the tools needed to invest in top talent across the barriers of gender, race, and other divides.

“Through new data and vivid stories of sponsor-protégé pairings across industries, *Sponsor Dividend* reasserts the business case for sponsorship and lays out the many rewards sponsors reap through full-fledged advocacy,” says Pat Fili-Krushel, CEO at CTI. “It demonstrates to senior leaders a fresh perspective on why sponsorship is a relationship they need to get right.”

The study reveals the many rewards that sponsorship confers:

- Sixty-six percent of sponsors report being satisfied with their ability to deliver on difficult projects, compared to 53 percent of non-sponsors.
- Thirty-six percent of sponsors are satisfied with their career prospects, compared to 28 percent of non-sponsors.
- Eighty-seven percent of sponsors are very engaged at work, compared to 73 percent of non-sponsors.
- Thirty-two percent of sponsors are satisfied with their level of awareness of junior colleagues’ concerns, compared to 15 percent of non-sponsors.

“Advocating for rising employees, along all stages of a career, pushes your *own* career forward. It signals your leadership capacity to those above you—that you are committed to the organization and tuned into up-and-coming managers,” says Julia Taylor Kennedy, executive vice president and director of publications at CTI.

Yet sponsorship is a visible role with several requirements. A sponsor takes personal responsibility for the career growth of their protégé and ensures their protégé has the visibility and the stretch assignments to earn them their next promotion. However, despite the sponsor’s role to provide support and advocacy, the research finds that 46 percent of sponsors do not believe in their protégé’s leadership potential.

Additionally, the “Mini-Me Syndrome,” in which sponsors tap talent that reminds them of themselves, often prevents sponsors from unlocking a critical reward of sponsorship—looking beyond top performance and loyalty to seek a protégé with a distinctive personal brand and the ability to add unique

value. Only 17 percent of sponsors say their primary protégé has a valuable style of management that is different from their own.

“When a sponsor or a senior-level advocate aligns themselves with diverse protégés, they are better prepared to face the global marketplace,” says Pooja Jain-Link, senior vice president and head of research at CTI. “Powerful individuals have an opportunity to develop this crucial workplace relationship. As our research shows, the returns can be tremendous.”

In its final section, the report maps a three-stage maturity curve of education, intervention, and embedding of sponsorship in an organization. American Express, Bank of America, and Johnson & Johnson, among others, are featured in the report as examples of companies that are either on their way to or have already built a successful, top-down work culture of sponsorship.

Research Sponsors:

American Express, Bank of America, Crowell & Moring LLP, Ernst & Young LLP, Freddie Mac, Interpublic Group, Johnson & Johnson, and Macquarie Group

Methodology:

The research consists of a survey; an Insights In-Depth® session (a proprietary web-based tool used to conduct voice-facilitated virtual focus groups); and one-on-one interviews with over 30 women and men.

The national survey was conducted online and over the phone in January 2018 among 3,213 respondents (1,566 men, 1,633 women, 12 not identifying as male or female, and 2 who did not disclose their gender) between the ages of 21 and 65 currently employed full time in white-collar professions with at least a bachelor’s degree. Data were weighted to be representative of the US population on key demographics (age, sex, education, race/ethnicity, housing tenure, telephone status, and census division). The base used for statistical testing was the effective base.

This survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago under the auspices of the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), a non-profit research organization. NORC was responsible for the data collection, while the Center for Talent Innovation conducted the analysis.

In the charts, percentages may not always add up to 100 because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses from respondents.

About the Center for Talent Innovation:

The Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) is a New York City–based think tank that focuses on global talent strategies and the retention and acceleration of well-qualified labor across the divides of demographic difference including gender, generation, geography, sexual orientation, and culture. CTI’s research partners now number more than 90 multinational corporations and organizations.