



Episode 55: Sponsorship - What it is and How to Get it

Elizabeth ([00:00:21](#)):

Susan, welcome to the Women in Product Podcast. I thought we could start with a brief overview of the differences between mentorship, coaching, and sponsorship. These terms get used interchangeably a lot of

Susan ([00:00:38](#)):

The time,

Elizabeth ([00:00:39](#)):

Even though they're quite different, and so I thought just by sort of setting the stage of how these are different would be a good place for us to start.

Susan ([00:00:49](#)):

I love starting there. Hi Elizabeth. Alright, so I'm going to try and make this really simple to start and then we can talk about it more. Let's start with mentoring is a person who wants to give you guidance and advice, and typically that person has experienced what you're asking about. So they have personal experience about it and they want to guide you, advise you, and it's very directive like here's some suggestions of what you should do. That's a mentor. Coach is the one where people get confused because the word coach is used in sports and things in a very different way. Coaching in this context means guiding you through your own self-awareness. So coaches ask a lot of questions for you to do your own self-reflection, but coaches do not tell you what to do. Do not guide you to what to do through their own experience.

Susan ([00:01:49](#)):

They help pull out from you where your best path is. I think those are the two words that really get used interchangeably a lot is mentoring and coaching. The people who have coaching certificates or sort of anything in that coaching world, that's how they define it. That's their definition. Sponsorship is the hardest one because it's not a word people use a lot. We use the word mentor or coach to sometimes mean a sponsor. Sponsors are advocates and the advocate is focused on your career progression and promotion. So Sylvia, Hewlett, the expert on this, defines it so beautifully. She doesn't even talk about coaching. It's kind of not her thing, but she says mentors advise sponsors irked, and I think that sums it up nicely.

Elizabeth ([00:02:45](#)):

Yeah, I've heard a lot people talk about how sponsors are the people who are in the rooms that you can't be and that they bring up your name as somebody who could be advanced, take on a different project, something that will advance your career.

Elizabeth ([00:03:10](#)):



Sometimes I think that we get a little stuck, or maybe I should say I get a little stuck in terms of thinking of sponsors as being somebody who's in your company and I have had people give me examples of people who have been career sponsors for them in recommending them to other people, helping them. They've found jobs that they thought that would advance them faster in a different company or different things like that. I don't know if you have any comment that you want to make on that. I think most of the time it's somebody in your company.

Susan ([00:03:50](#)):

Yes, most of the time it is someone in your company. However, the key to sponsorship is it has to be someone who has influence within the group which you are aspiring to. So if you are aspiring to move to another company, then your sponsor will probably be in that company. If you are aspiring to move to a whole different division within your company, then even if they're in your company, they might not be able to be a sponsor. So the key to sponsorship is that person has power and influence within the group that you're looking to move into. Where is that promotion looking to be? So within your company, most of the time we're looking to move internally. So our sponsor would be internal, but absolutely if you have a sponsor outside who can get you those promotional opportunities in other places or maybe even that person has power influence within your organization because they are so powerful and they're connected to other people there, it really is about does that person have power and influence to talk to the right people to get you into those stretch assignments, job opportunities, talk about you when you're not in the room, all those things.

Elizabeth ([00:05:00](#)):

That's a really great definition and really helpful. I think let's talk a little bit about preparing for sponsorship because I think that sometimes people think that it's something that just happens to them and I think that there are things that you can do to a prepare for it and actually find somebody who can play that role for you. So actively go look for it. So talk a little bit about preparing for sponsorship. What should people do to prepare?

Susan ([00:05:39](#)):

Oh my goodness, this is my favorite. It's like asking a chef their favorite recipe this I love. So sponsorship is typically organic. There are sponsorship programs and I always say to women, if you have any opportunity to be assigned a sponsor, absolutely positively do that. But that is more the exception than the rule. So sponsorship is organic, which means it's going to kind of bubble up on its own, but there are lots of factors that make that happen. So it isn't like lightning striking you. It's not like out of the blue, you're suddenly surprised you have a sponsor. So what do you do to prepare for it? It really takes a lot of hard work on your part. First and foremost, you have to be an exceptional employee and many people will say you need to stand out from your peers, so you need to audit your own stuff on that.

Susan ([00:06:32](#)):



Really take an external audit of when I look at all my peers and how they're performing, do I stand out? Do I stand out for my peers? So that's step one. It's expected that you'll be an exceptional employee. That's kind of the basis of step one. Step two is networking, name recognition, all those things because one of the biggest myths that women hold is if I am an exceptional employee, heads down, the sponsor will find me. And I mean the research is so clear about this, it is the biggest myth holding women back from career advancement and we all believed it until we knew it was wrong. So anyone who's listening who believes it, we all believed it. It's not true. It's a myth. So you have to be heads up, you have to be heads up, you have to be meeting people, getting your name out there.

Susan ([00:07:27](#)):

There has to be recognition of who you are because sponsors don't come hunting. It's sort of like you have to be out there so they can see you. So that's sort of the second step. I have to be an exceptional employee. I have to really be out there. I have to have name recognition, people that have to know who I am. So that's things like join ERGs, join stuff at your company, get on projects and build your brand. So that's the third piece is to really know your brand, which just means what do you bring that is unique to the workplace? What do I bring that's unique? And there are lots of ways to find that out because none of us are probably born knowing that. The biggest one for me is the standout assessment by Marcus Buckingham, available free online. So everyone should go take the standout assessment.

Susan ([00:08:22](#)):

It will help you understand your unique contributions and strengths in the workplace. Very data-driven, very reliable and valid assessment. And then you need to really sit with that. What do I bring that's unique because why would someone want to sponsor me? So when preparing to be sponsored, you need to say I'm an awesome employee. So I bring that to the table. People know who I am, they know I'm great to work with, they know I deliver on time, they know all those things about my behaviors, and then I have to help them understand my impact. The unique things might bring to the workplace. Until you know that about yourself, you haven't done the work that's probably needed for a sponsor to see you as someone that they want to sponsor.

Elizabeth ([00:09:10](#)):

Can we take a step back and kind of delve a little deeper in each of those? Because one of the things that comes to mind when you talked about just the first one being an exceptional performer, I think there's a lot of women who are exceptional performers who don't recognize that they're exceptional performers, right? Absolutely. I see this all the time. I've fallen prey to this. Oh, must get the A must be the looking to be perfect, looking to be super good and always kind of discounting where you fit in that stack. So are there any sort of tips or tricks that you have to help people really step back and think about their own performance level, see their own exceptional or how they might be exceptional or where I'm going?



Susan ([00:10:14](#)):

So again, I love data, so I'm going to cite a little data. Women underestimate their performance when men overestimate their performance. So in sort of self performance reviews, if you have to rate yourself on a scale of one to five, then if both of you were actually a three, the woman might say she's a two and the man will say he's a four. That's just what the research tells us. So I think especially for women, it's helpful to know. However, I see myself, I got to boost that. However I see myself is not accurate. And I've coached a lot of women who say, but I want to be humble. And humble is great. Humble is different than understanding your actual performance. So you can be humble about it, but you should also be clear about what you bring to the table and know that you are underestimating.

Susan ([00:11:07](#)):

So if we know that, what can we do about it? This is where your mentors come in. This is where this other category that doesn't get talked about as much, but your champions supporter of whatever you want to call them. It's the people who cheer you on. It's maybe not the people of power and influence to get you that next step, but they're there to remind you how awesome you are and to kind of infuse that energy to inspire you about your own career. So sometimes those are role models. Sometimes it's just friends. It can be a variety of people, but I think we definitely need supporters who can help us take an objective look and mentors who can help us take an objective look and to really say, why did I evaluate myself the way I did? And that's hard for us to do.

Susan ([00:11:54](#)):

So I always say, you must have your committee with people to help you with that. Women don't ask for enough feedback and people tend to not provide as much feedback to women because we think people think we can't hear it. So you have to be more actively seeking feedback. You really need to ask people, how would you rate me? How do you see me? Why do you see me that way? Give me examples. And you have to ask for an ongoing way, not once a year in your performance review. So I think it's getting into that habit of this week, who am I going to reach out to and ask for some feedback? Because if they see me in a favorable way and I don't see myself there yet, maybe I can start to see myself that way. I always say mentors to the people who believe in you before you believe in yourself and you must find who those people are. I think you're on mute, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth ([00:12:50](#)):

In a previous conversation, you also brought up the idea of regularly, I think you said weekly at the time, writing down things that you accomplished. I think your formulation was, I did X in support of Y. I thought that that was a brilliant thing because it's a sort of, if you will record of what you've done so that you can discuss those things with other people, validate them, but also just really have that concrete record that shows the things that you've accomplished. And I think that that helps make it real what your performance is and also helps you to really see clearly what



you've contributed. It doesn't just go like, oh well, right? It's like it isn't black and white.

Susan ([00:13:53](#)):

Yes. The big thing to me is women just focusing on behaviors. What are my behaviors and what's the impact of my behavior? So that to me is just no to me. It frees me up of feeling like I need to have these deep, I need to think about what I did or how do I feel about what I did. It really to me, I like when it's a bit more data. So my suggestion is every Friday, take five minutes at the end of the week and write down at least one thing that you did that you felt like was kind of your high point of the week. And I always say, really what I want to say I did all week is I answered all my emails. That cannot be the high point of your week. I mean it probably took 90% of your time, but that's not your high point.

Susan ([00:14:38](#)):

That's not the behavior that is the high point of your week. So it is what is the behavior that I did? What is the X and the impact was Y, and the Y should be something that your company cares about. So back to this whole why would someone sponsor me or be a mentor, because I understand our business, I understand what matters to our business. And so you have to understand that. So is there a huge project that everything is in support of that project? Whatever your company's values are right now, what's the big thing? I'm going to say what's like the hot project? Understand that. And so how do your behaviors tie to that? I did X in support of Y and then at least one a week, maybe you'll have more. Then once a month you go to that committee of people, again, your friends, your champions, your supporters, your mentors, and you say, here were the four things in a minimum they did this month, which of these do you see as valuable?

Susan ([00:15:33](#)):

If you had to rank order them and you start to understand what people value about your impact, the bonus is when you're asking for their feedback, you're also getting to tell them the amazing things you did. And I think that's the hardest thing for women to figure out. How do I tell people the things I'm doing? And so the way you tell them, so I just saying, here are the things I did and I really want to understand which these do you see as most valuable. And then help me understand if none of these were valuable and I listed them as my top value, there's a big disconnect. And that disconnect is the best foot in your door for really important and probably difficult career conversations because the worst thing that can happen is when I feel like I'm a really great employee, I feel like I'm really working hard, I feel like I'm doing all this great stuff and it never gets noticed, or B, other people didn't think it was great, and you don't want to find that out once a year in a performance review.

Susan ([00:16:26](#)):

To me, finding it out monthly by sort of your weekly journal is just a way better approach. If there's a problem, you catch it earlier rather than waiting a year to hear about it,



Elizabeth ([00:16:35](#)):

You do course correction really early on. You get that feedback of what the organization values and why, which is important to understand, to really understand if that is a place where you fit, if your values, your focus align there. And then the second thing that you brought up was name recognition and building a reputation. I think what you just said is so important to that, which is getting comfortable talking about what you're doing with people and what you've accomplished. And like you said, I think people feel like it's bragging. And I always say to them, it's not bragging, it's just it's the truth, right? It's reality, right? Having those conversations and being able to comfortably discuss what you accomplished and why you thought that was important, et cetera, is also another way of you understanding what is important to other people, what's important to the organization. But that level of getting comfortable talking about that becomes so important because as a former boss of mine once said, which has always stuck with me, it's not what, and it's not. Who knows what, you know, if you're taking away doing all this great stuff and people higher up in the organization don't know that,

Elizabeth ([00:18:14](#)):

That's a pity, that's a

Susan ([00:18:17](#)):

Waste, that's a missed opportunity for sure. Yeah. That is

Elizabeth ([00:18:20](#)):

A missed opportunity for everybody. So having being able to talk about that confidently and it's not bragging, once you get to that level of confidence in talking about that, then things get easier that way. Right?

Susan ([00:18:39](#)):

Yeah. There's a couple of things I would love to add to that. So first of all, nobody starts off comfortable in these conversations. So again, people listening to this podcast, if you're thinking, well, then I'm already opting out because Susan and Elizabeth are comfortable with these, believe me, nobody starts off comfortable in these conversations so early in your career, if it feels awful and miserable, then you're probably doing the right thing. It will feel that way. A couple of things that I thought of when you said is, one, we must embrace feedback and we're just not taught to do that in school. You get your test back and it is just written at the top. I got a hundred or 90 or an 80, but no one's sitting down. I don't have to have a conversation about it. And so we are not taught through really much of our lives that conversation.

Susan ([00:19:32](#)):

And so the first time we sit down and we have a conversation with maybe one of your bosses who says something that sounds like, Susan, you got a 90 on this test. And I'm like, well, that's no good. 90 is not good. I'm a student. I should have had a hundred. So we immediately go into that perfectionist trap, which for women, I



always say, I mean, perfection is the enemy of everything. Perfection is an enemy of sponsorship and mentorship and success than your own personal mental health. Perfection is such a trap. And what I tell people is you have to remember that perfection lies to you. It tells you that it is what you should strive for, and that's a big fat lie. So you just have to remember when you're feeling that need to be perfect, perfection is going to lie to you and it's going to keep you from actually being the amazing employee that you can be. So it is a ball and chain around your ankle. And we could probably have a whole podcast about that. But so first of all, knowing these conversations can be hard. Yep. Second, you just have to embrace the gift of feedback. And until you truly see it as a gift, you're just going to be stuck because none of were born as great career leaders.

Susan ([00:20:53](#)):

I mean, how did we learn to become career leaders because someone decided to invest in us and help us out and tell us really challenging and hard things. So I always say that there are two things that people told me in my career that probably changed the course of my career in the most positive way forever. And I didn't like hearing either one of them. So the first one is I was told that in order to get to the next level of leadership, I had to stop caring if people liked me. And I was like, well then I guess I'm not going to progress as a leader because clearly I'm going to care if people like me. And so when my sponsor gave me that challenge, that feedback, I had to sit with it for such a long time. But I mean sometimes a long time is years or until you really get it really great mentors and sponsors dangle this carrot out there that seems so ridiculous in your career trajectory that you feel like it was a ridiculous thing for them to say.

Susan ([00:21:51](#)):

And then because they've planted it out there, you'll take baby steps and you'll start to see that vision that they had for you. And I was like, oh, now I get what that person meant. It's okay that I care that people like me, but I can't make leadership decisions based on popularity. I'm going to make decisions that may be unpopular, but they're right for the business and they will be kind and fair when I will be a really compassionate and great leader, but I don't lead based on popularity. And that was really a big challenge, big challenge for me. So in your career, hopefully you'll have those moments where someone says something to you that at the time feels so painful and you'll be so defensive and you'll want to tell them why they're wrong. And in the moment you'll probably do that because we all do.

Susan ([00:22:42](#)):

But in time, I just encourage people to really sit with it. If that advice comes from someone that you respect and someone who knows you well and actually has your best interest at heart, then you really have to listen to it. And that's how you start to also look liable to a sponsor. Because sponsor is going to give you hard feedback. And if the minute someone is testing you and gives you a little hard feedback and you become defensive and all that, they're probably not going to come back around again and think, I want to sponsor that person. So being open to professional growth,



being open to feedback is that's a key piece for getting sponsors. So it's a tough one for all of us, but we got to get there.

Elizabeth ([00:23:27](#)):

Yeah. The thing that I find about that type of stuff is that you mentioned being uncomfortable, and what I have learned over time is

Susan ([00:23:45](#)):

Embrace

Elizabeth ([00:23:46](#)):

The discomfort. That is always where your leading edge is. It doesn't mean that you just take every bit of advice that people throw your way because you need to think about it. Sometimes you need to sit with it and sometimes advice is right and you can embrace it. And there's other times when it's sort of like, yeah, I can't be that. I remember distinctly Alex Hardiman, who's the CPO at the New York Times saying, telling me that she had been given advice about essentially being a bigger presence and being more forceful, and she said, I'm a tiny little person, and they were basically telling me to be six foot and I'm five two, it's never going to happen. That will never work for me. So she said, I did have to sort through which advice that I could use, but in every case I thought about it and thought, what were they getting at there and

Susan ([00:24:52](#)):

How

Elizabeth ([00:24:52](#)):

Do I address that core thing that they're getting at? So I think I would just encourage everybody, when you feel discomfort, even if in that moment you need to go walk away from the discomfort,

Susan ([00:25:08](#)):

Don't

Elizabeth ([00:25:08](#)):

Permanently walk away from it, right?

Susan ([00:25:10](#)):

Yeah,

Elizabeth ([00:25:11](#)):

You may need to take it in smaller doses or whatever, but that discomfort is an indication that that's your learning edge and don't just blow it off, if you will.

Susan ([00:25:24](#)):



So to your question about visibility, Elizabeth, which I think is kind of what we're dancing around here, but I want to be a little bit more direct. So how do we gain visibility in name recognition? So again, you have to be comfortable engaging with other people. That's step one. And depending on your temperament, is there an introvert, an extrovert and ambivert and that whole continuum, you have a different comfort level. So find your comfortable way to do that. So for me as an extrovert, I can go to a big networking event and I'll be comfortable. Introverts might want to have more of a one-on-one. So whatever your style and preference is, do it your way. So let's say that you're an introvert and the idea of going to a big networking event is never going to work because you're not going to go out and introduce yourself to enough people. So being there really defeated the purpose. I didn't introduce myself to anyone, so there was no visibility or name recognition. Then you have to figure out a way to do it. Again, once a week decide I'm going to reach out and ask for 15 minute chat with someone in my organization who I don't normally work with.

Susan ([00:26:37](#)):

That classic sort of, can we set up a 15 minute coffee virtually in person, whatever, and I'm going to get to know you and you're going to get to know me. And maybe each have an agenda ahead of time of tell me one thing that you've done here that you're most proud of, and we're each going to share that whatever agenda feels comfortable to you, but you need to do that because that's how you're going to get the name recognition. So it is not going to happen sitting at your computer by yourself just crunching out great work. Which again, step one is you need to be an exceptional employee, but that will not get you the classic phrase, what got you here won't get you there. The top coaches, that's what they'll tell you that that stuff happened early in your career. You can be heads down and a good employee and you'll be noticed because you're going to differentiate, it's a bell-shaped curve and you're at the top, but then you move to the next level and all the people at the top are back. And now there's a bell-shaped curve again. So kind of those early career successes of what got you the recognition, you got to amp it up, it involves a lot more name recognition, disability, and getting comfortable with claiming your accomplishments.

Elizabeth ([00:28:05](#)):

So I'm really glad that you brought up introverts versus extroverts and that there are ways to get recognition and to build your level of comfort and your style of doing it right? If you're an introvert, you don't have to have the same style as an extrovert, but you do have to find ways to get in front of people for people to know what you're doing. And there are lots of ways to do that. So I want to kind of switch gears here.

Elizabeth ([00:29:10](#)):

So I kind want to shift gears here and talk a little bit about identifying potential sponsors because if you're being very thoughtful and preparing yourself for a sponsor, how do you identify one? If you could talk a little bit about that. I think that often we think about our direct boss as



Susan ([00:29:42](#)):

Being

Elizabeth ([00:29:43](#)):

The likely candidate for that, but even what you said earlier, there's other options too.

Susan ([00:29:48](#)):

Yeah. So if your direct boss is someone who you have a good relationship with and they have power and influence to get you to the next level, then that's a great place to start in your looking. It really depends on your organization and the layers of your organization is your direct boss someone who has enough power and influence. So typically it is your skip level manager is the likely target of the first place to look for sponsor. So for me, that's sort of step one is I may have the world's best relationship with my manager, but does that person have enough power and influence more than I have? And in some organizations the answer would be yes and some it's no. So then looking at that skip level manager, there are a few things that I think are the hidden gems of what to look for in a potential sponsor. So Sylvia Hewlett the expert in this, she says, look for the juice. I just love that phrase, look for the juice

Elizabeth ([00:30:50](#)):

And

Susan ([00:30:51](#)):

The juice is does that person seem to have propelled their own career successfully? And if not, then that to me is kind of a big red flag. So there are people who have held the same position forever, they seem very happy holding the same position forever. Might be the most lovely boss or lovely person in the world, but probably not a great sponsor because if their own career hasn't been on a fast track trajectory, it probably means they haven't found a sponsor yet. Or maybe they're just not super interested in career mobility. So when you're talking all about career mobility, that's not their jam. So look for people who seem to have fast track their own career, that to me is always like, oh, that's interesting. They seem to figured that out. The second is that one of the key differentiators between mentors and sponsors is mentoring is a one-way. Street sponsorship is a two-way street. What does that mean? Mentors mentor you from the goodness of their heart. They literally just want to help. They expect nothing in return. Perhaps by putting the karma out there, you'll go mentor someone else someday. It's kind of the big pool of all good karma, but it is a one-way street. So mentors don't expect you to mentor them in return or to do anything to them in return.

Susan ([00:32:08](#)):

Sponsors is a two-way street, and this to me was the hardest thing to wrap my head around in finding my own sponsor. Why would my skip level manager or someone at that level, what could I do to help them if it's a two-way street, if it's quid pro quo, if it's you help me and I help you, what could I possibly do? And so I think also for



women, most people to skip level in most organizations, high percentage chance they might be male, then now it gets additionally awkward and strange, that person is helping me. What do they expect in return? Why are they helping me? And I think there's just a lot of dynamics that can really start to play out in challenging ways when we talk about the sponsorship relationship. And I know I personally struggled with a lot because at the time, most of the men in my corporate career were senior to me, very few women senior to me.

Susan ([00:33:07](#)):

And so my sponsors were men. And I just kept thinking, why are they sponsoring me? Why are they helping me? I don't get it. So I asked one day very directly to my sponsor, I said, Kevin, why are you helping me? And he almost smiled because again, he, I think it was a very female question that I asked. And so he was sort of humored by that. And here's what he said, Susan, no senior leader is going to put their own reputation on the line to help you unless you have earned it. Not going to happen. A mentor might kindly guide you, but a sponsor who is someone who is advocating for you, who is staking their own reputation on other people believing in you, they will not do that if you haven't earned it. So even though you may not see how you've earned it, don't doubt it.

Susan ([00:34:05](#)):

And I was like, huh. So I tell that to women all the time. But the point where someone is really saying, how can I help you? Who do you want to meet? What are your next career goals? Those are the type of questions which are the key questions to say, is that person interested in being my sponsor? They won't show up and say, Hey, I want to be your sponsor. No one's going to say that. People don't even really know the word. But when someone says, Elizabeth, what do you see for yourself in the next one to two years? What's the next step you want here? How can I help you? Who can I introduce you to? Hey, come meet this client. All of those phrases mean that person wants to start advocating for you. And if they're doing that, they see something in you that you might not see in yourself yet, but you don't need to doubt it.

Susan ([00:34:47](#)):

It is not out of the goodness of their heart. It is a two-way street. They see the value. So I will believe that. But then my next question is, what was the value? What value do I bring? All right, so here's the key piece. You bring the skillset that they don't have. So your sponsor cannot be someone who is your exact clone. If they're your exact clone and you share the exact same skillset, they probably won't be your sponsor. What you need to think about is when I do a really great job, who does it roll up to so that it looks like they did a great job? So I'm on someone's team, it rolls up. They're getting kudos up here. So look for people who are in that umbrella who are in a very different area. So in my example, my sponsor was on the business side, CFO, business finance, that kind of stuff.

Susan ([00:35:44](#)):



I was in research and development, so I was in charge of the products we were developing. Kevin had to trust products were good. He had no idea the nitty gritty details of development and couldn't have really talked about those. And so he had to trust that I was doing a good job because if he couldn't trust that he couldn't sleep at night, he had to trust that. And so the core of sponsorship is about trust. It is trust that you'll be an exceptional employee, trust that you'll be loyal to me and the organization. And so it is that piece of trust. So if you have a sponsor, you wouldn't blindside your sponsor. You wouldn't have stood up and quit the next day. You wouldn't know that a project was going to be late and not tell them. So you really are the eyes and ears of your sponsor.

Susan ([00:36:39](#)):

And in return for that, in return for that trust, in return for that loyalty, they will help advance your career. Now here is the icing and the cake of brilliance again, from the brilliant Sylvie you lift prior to her recent research in the sponsor effect, her recent book, which still to me was like, I get it. But there was always to me the but. And then she came out with this piece of research, which I may not quote perfectly, but I'm going to be close. The senior person who sponsors a mid-career, rising star is 59% more likely to be promoted themselves than someone who doesn't sponsor. And that to me was my light bulb moment. This is not a gift that Kevin gave me. It truly is a two-way street. And I mean if women listen to nothing else, this podcast, this to me is the most important thing we can say. When someone is sponsoring you, it is not the gift they've given you. It is a mutually beneficial two-way street gift.

Elizabeth ([00:37:46](#)):

By

Susan ([00:37:46](#)):

Sponsoring you, they are more likely to be promoted themselves. And it's because if they can find the rising stars in the organization and you have loyalty to them, and the organization sees Elizabeth is our rising rockstar, oh, that's sponsoring her. Suddenly that package or the sponsor looks very favorable. And so that to me was just the most important last piece of data that I needed to really let go of all my baggage about why is someone's sponsoring me.

Elizabeth ([00:38:19](#)):

Yeah, I mean I think when you take a step back and think about it, that makes perfect sense because as you rise up in the organization, your ability to find those key leaders, those outstanding performers, those people who really drive the business and deliver that becomes incredibly valuable, right? Yes. Because it isn't so much about when you're a vp, you're not the person doing all the detail stuff. It's your assessment of who can lead, who has the right thing for different roles, et cetera,

Susan ([00:38:59](#)):

Right? It's developing your A team, and if you help build the brand of someone's a team, that's the reciprocal that they will then help advance your career. I mean, I



would say it's a little bit like the crane, that the car is hooked together as they advance you, advance, as they advance, you advance and they're kind of pulling you along, not out of a favor, but again, because it helps their team. Yeah,

Elizabeth ([00:39:22](#)):

And I think it's also helpful that in this conversation that it's not per se asking somebody to be your sponsor, it's developing the relationship so that they see the value that you bring and then they will sort of, if it's appropriate, take up that mantle, right? They'll see you as having value. So it's not per se you going in and asking somebody to be your sponsor. Got

Susan ([00:39:53](#)):

It. You just can't. You can ask someone to be a mentor. I think that's a whole different thing when you do ask someone to be a mentor, be clear about what you want them to mentor you on. This sums up a lot where someone says, will you be my mentor? And the person says, sure. What are you looking for help on? And you can't articulate that. So I'm looking to build my brand. I'm looking to whatever it is. When you ask a mentor to mentor you have it be about something, a specific thing you're trying to get better at.

Susan ([00:40:21](#)):

So I think you can ask, A mentor would be my mentor. I can't imagine under any circumstances that someone could say, could you be my sponsor? It just does not, I can't think of even the exception to the rule on that that I've ever heard of that. Again, there are programs where a company will pair up people because they've done a lot of research and due diligence and they do a lot of stuff, but you have to earn sponsorship and you will know when you have a sponsor. And if you don't know, then it means you don't have one yet. You will know when you have a sponsor because suddenly other people will start talking about you. And that's when I've asked women, how did you know when you had a sponsor? And they would tell me, someone else came up to me and said, Hey, I heard about that great project you worked on and I had never told that person, which means my sponsor is out advocating for me with other people. So it's that whole, my name is bubbling up more in conversation now than it wasn't because I went and told people about it.

Elizabeth ([00:45:58](#)):

Yeah, there you go. Well, thank you for taking the time. I mean, that was incredibly interesting and valuable. I'm hoping everybody's going to walk away with at least one or two things that they can do to kind of make them a more attractive sponsoree, as you said,

Susan ([00:46:20](#)):

So many words. Hey Elizabeth, can we leave people with one final really easy

Elizabeth ([00:46:24](#)):



Tip? We can please do. Okay.

Susan ([00:46:26](#)):

Alright. So again, this one comes from research. My favorite book they keep referencing is called How Women Rise 12 Myths Holding Women Back, Sally Gelson and Marshall Goldsmith. So for women, a couple of things I think you can absolutely do. Go take the standout assessment online, Marcus Buckingham Free, do that absolutely positively and read how women rise. Sally Gelson, Marshall Goldsmith. It is 12 behaviors that we as women have that hold us back that are different than behaviors that hold men back. So it's not saying men are perfect. No, this isn't about fixing women. There are gender roadblocks and there are 12 that are unique to women. And when I read the book, I was like, yep, do that. Yep, do that. When you read them, they're just behaviors. It's not like some deep seat. I have to change who I am as a person.

Susan ([00:47:17](#)):

It's simple behaviors. And here is one of them, which is one of my favorites. It's to use the word I versus we. So we've all seen the big posters, no, I in team that actually came from Marshall Goldsmith, who's considered probably the top CEO executive coach in the world. And he partners with Sally Gelson on this book. So when he started coaching CEO people, he noticed they kept saying the word I all the time, I did this, I did that, I did that. And he is like, huh, here's the scope. You need to use the word we more. And so the whole, there's no I in team came from the fact that men, which he didn't think of it as men, he thought of them as senior leaders.

Elizabeth ([00:47:58](#)):

So as more

Susan ([00:47:59](#)):

Women became senior leaders and they continued to study this, guess what they found? Women are using the word we all the time. So the advice now for women became, you need to use the word buy more often.

Elizabeth ([00:48:15](#)):

There is not all the time. It's more often, right? More often it needs to be a mix of those two.

Susan ([00:48:23](#)):

And I even say you can mix it in the same sentence because people are always like, well, how do I mix it? And I say, first of all, when someone pays you a compliment, you need to learn to say thank you and bite your tongue and just bite it as hard as you need to say nothing more. Because what we tend to say is women is thank you, but really my team did everything. So just people aren't going to want to even give you credit anymore if that's always the answer. Because they're really genuinely saying, Elizabeth, you did this amazing thing. And at the very best, if you can't do



anything else, please just say thank you. I'm really proud of the work I did by your tongue. Stop there. Okay, now if you can take it a step further, you can say, thank you.

Susan ([00:49:06](#)):

I'm really proud of the work I did on that project. Here was the piece where I really contributed, and then I had this amazing team. And then don't just say, you had an amazing team because that's giving credit to no one. They don't know who your team was. So as women, we want to support other women. So then I would say, thank you. I'm really proud of the piece I did. And by the way, Mickey did this piece on the team, and Rosie did this piece and Sue did this piece. And they were amazing because now you've actually given credit, you've taken credit for yourself, which we need to learn to do. And you've given credit to others, not just a blanket, it was my team. It was to actual, you're providing visibility and name recognition for other people. And so that to me is something that if it takes a little practice, just a little change of our kind of muscle memory of how we respond. But that's the one I've really, I just feel like that's a great behavior change that we can make

Elizabeth ([00:49:59](#)):

Great recommendations. Thank you. You're welcome. Book a little behavior change, a test that people can take. Thank you, Susan. It's been great talking to you.

Susan ([00:50:13](#)):

Thanks, Elizabeth.