



Insist on quality sponsorship

By Cynthia J. Young

Did you have a sponsor when you started your job, or did you just have someone assigned to you to get your computer set up and your onboarding complete?

A sponsor is a person with knowledge about the organization who is assigned to answer questions and help a new hire get settled and adjusted to the new environment. They are not meant to mentor. Their main goal is to answer questions a new hire has about coming into the organization, moving to a new location and any expectations they may not have felt comfortable asking about during the interview process.

I had sponsors assigned to me throughout my U.S. Navy career each time I received orders to transfer. In 1990, I had already been in the Navy for about a year going through my required schools when I received my orders to my first duty station. I knew nothing about San Diego, California, my job or the expectations my boss had for me. I showed up in the San Diego airport not knowing I had been assigned a sponsor, and not having a clue where I was going. I arrived at my duty station and was faced with two locked gates. I was scared, hating San Diego and the Navy at that moment.

I found the communications box, buzzed it and started talking to the quarterdeck watch stander, who had no idea I was coming to the duty station or my assigned sponsor. I took the taxi to check into the barracks in Coronado. The next day, I taxied my way back to my base

where the gates were unlocked and my sponsor was waiting for me.

Throughout my military career, I transferred every 1½ to two years, and had more than a dozen sponsors. These sponsors made an incredible difference since they helped me get settled at the new commands, got me in touch with

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the best people to answer questions they could not and helped me to understand the command culture from the beginning. I also acted as a sponsor for my own reliefs. It was a true learning experience.

There are three things to insist on for quality sponsorship.

Contact early and communicate often. Have the assigned sponsor reach out to the new hire to welcome them and let them know what to expect their first week. The sponsor should tell them who will be available to answer questions and help them when they first get on board. The idea is to be helpful, available and sincere, and let the new hire know they are coming to a new organization that wants them there.

Don't "fire and forget." Don't assign a sponsor and consider your job done.

Make sure the sponsor has knowledge of and access to resources they need to support the new hire. Ask the sponsor how the sponsorship is progressing and if they need anything from you.

Manage expectations. When you talk to a new hire before they come on board, let them know they will have someone to answer questions and to help them acclimate. Let the sponsor know what they are expected to do. Consider having published guidance on the overall expectations that all sponsors read before sponsorship starts. This is critical, especially if you won't be available on their first day to meet with your new hire.

The bottom line is that a sponsor can make the difference between a person showing up because they accepted the position or a person showing up because they are truly looking forward to joining the team. ❖

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