



Mentors on steroids: How advocates advance your career

Do you have an advocate at work who is championing your cause? An advocate relationship is like a mentorship on steroids. Instead of remaining out of sight in the background, mentoring you privately, an advocate promotes you in a very public way, **increasing your visibility** and chances for promotion.

Who needs an advocate?

According to **a white paper** – “Advocacy vs. Mentoring” by Sylvia Ann Hewlett Associates – people who have advocates are more likely to ask for stretch assignments and raises. They have more doors opened for them and are more satisfied with their rate of **career advancement**. If that sounds like something you want, then you need to have an advocate – or several advocates – on your side.

Advocates are especially important for women, minorities and anyone else in a group that is at a disadvantage in a predominately straight, white, male working environment. Having an advocate helps level the playing field and open up opportunities that would not otherwise be available in a corporate world where there seems to be a “fast track” to the top of the career ladder for people who fit preconceived notions of what management should look like.

One reason this is true is that your advocates are higher up in the organization than you are and often present at the meetings that determine whether you will be promoted. As you build relationships with these people, they become comfortable with you, and executives like to promote people they feel comfortable with.

How advocates help advance your career

Like mentors, advocates help you expand your vision of what is possible so that you can achieve more. They give you practical advice and suggestions that you can apply to do a better job in your current position and increase your chances of advancing. In addition, they become public spokespeople, promoting you and increasing your visibility whenever they get the chance. Here are some ways advocates can help advance your career:

- **They speak up on your behalf.** Advocates watch for opportunities to tell others about your accomplishments. They talk about you at meetings and during casual office conversation. This increases your visibility by keeping your name in front of other executives.
- **They help you land important projects.** They have the influence needed to get you assigned to projects that will help increase your perception and visibility. It's up to you to put everything you have into making these projects a success, but without an advocate, you might never get the opportunity.
- **They introduce you to company leaders.** They help you expand your network by introducing you to executives and other colleagues you might not otherwise get a chance to interact with.
- **They actively advocate for your next promotion.** Wouldn't it be great if you had someone pulling for you next time you were **up for a promotion**? That's what advocates do. And you don't have to stop at one, either. There is no reason you can't have several advocates on your side when you're ready to move to the next stage of your career.

Are you a rising star with **untapped leadership potential**? Don't be afraid to ask someone to be your advocate. The answer might very well be, "Yes!" Even if it isn't, you've increased your visibility just by asking.

*Joel Garfinkle is the author of "**Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level.**" His website has more than 200 **leadership articles**. As an executive coach, Garfinkle has worked with Wells Fargo Bank, Cisco Systems, Oracle, Deloitte, Amazon, Microsoft, Google, Starbucks, Citibank and The Ritz-Carlton. **Subscribe** to his executive-coaching newsletter, and you'll receive a free e-book, "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"*