



Q&A

Nongee Kandjii

Associate

ENS

Mentorship, sisterhood and 'lifting as you rise'

In your journey, have you experienced the difference between a mentor (who gives advice) and a sponsor (who actively advocates for your promotion behind closed doors)? How are you playing the role of sponsor for others now?

As a young professional eager to climb the corporate ladder, I have been privileged to experience a handful of intentional mentors and sponsors on my journey. In practically differentiating between the two, mentors have provided guidance on how best to climb towards success. This looked like bringing several opportunities for professional development and exposure to my attention, supporting my applications towards upskilling platforms, and providing guidance, motivation and review of the strategies I have employed towards the climb. Sponsors, on the other hand, have played a more direct role in the advancement of my career by holding the ladder steady to ensure my successful ascent in Corporate. This looked like advocating for my participation in major instructions that would lead to better chances at promotion, making direct client referrals, and allowing me the room to fail forward without falling off of the ladder completely.

In paying it forward, I now contribute to the next generation by pulling juniors into more mandates and ensuring that they are not just at the tables that matter, but are also capacitated to contribute meaningfully to those tables. The best mentors and sponsors have not just guided me along the correct paths, but have helped me prepare to succeed and lead on them, and that is the same ethos with which I hope to help light the paths of those coming behind me.

What is the most rewarding piece of tactical advice you've ever given to a junior female colleague that you watched her successfully put into practice?

I have continuously, and controversially, advised those coming behind me to unashamedly use every (ethical and legal) weapon in their arsenal to succeed. I believe we all have our unique set of skills, talents, strengths, and privileges that can make our paths slightly smoother if we employ them tactically. Beyond the obvious

advice to work hard, be helpful, and take initiative, I have also advised others to invest in developing positive, authentic, (and HR-approved) workplace connections with the seniors to whom they can genuinely relate. Whether this is based on shared hobbies, mutual interests, or even a common love for whatever team Lewis Hamilton drives for this season, connecting with the real human being who exists outside of their professional capacity will make for more pleasant workplace relations, which ultimately leads to a greater flow of instructions from that senior. It is through these genuine relationships with supportive seniors that I have seen

juniors steer their otherwise conventional careers into niche and specialised fields that are notoriously difficult to break into. The only caveat to this is that likeability can never replace competence.

Building a deal pipeline relies heavily on networks that are often built in informal spaces. How can young women build authentic, high-value networks on their own terms?

It is essential for young women to build authentic, high-value networks as it is widely understood that any career advancement in corporate, particularly in smaller jurisdictions, will be largely influenced by networks, reputation and informal referrals. In the practical pursuit of this, young women should prioritise joining professional societies, industry bodies and communities that will expose

them to like-minded individuals on similar paths, whether those are sector-specific associations, women-in-business forums or cross-border deal networks. The key, however, is authenticity. The spaces a young professional chooses to occupy must genuinely reflect her interests, values and long-term ambitions rather than simply ticking a box of attendance. Networks built on a foundation of shared purpose tend to yield relationships of real substance; mentors who invest meaningfully, peers who refer opportunities with confidence, and sponsors who advocate in rooms where decisions are made. When a young woman selects her communities on her own terms, she is far more likely to contribute consistently, build a credible profile within those circles, and convert professional goodwill into a tangible deal pipeline over time. 🙌