

# HOW TO PURPOSEFULLY SPONSOR BLACK TALENT TOOLKIT

IF  
NOT  
NOW  
WHEN

This toolkit is focused on Sponsoring Black Talent with some useful key actions which can be implemented immediately to make a difference to your approach to Sponsorship.

## Why Sponsorship is important

Within their narrative around diversity and inclusion, most companies will state that everyone should be able to thrive and fulfil their potential. The reality is that for many companies we are not seeing this happen and where it is happening the pace of change is slow, particularly for Black employees moving into senior roles.

A poll of more than 24,000 UK employees by Business in the Community (BITC) found 74 per cent of Black respondents said career progression was important, compared to just 42 per cent of white respondents – showing that Black employees tend to report greater ambition for progression than their White counterparts.

However Black individuals are often over-mentored and under sponsored which has disproportionately held back their career advancement.

If Not Now, When? is an initiative by;

**audeliss**  
executive search

**involve**  
the inclusion people

## Why CEOs and Senior Leaders are integral to Sponsorship

Sponsorship requires active support by someone appropriately placed in the organisation who has significant influence on decision-making processes or structures and who is advocating for, protecting, and fighting for the career advancement of individuals.

CEOs, their direct reports and senior leaders have a vital role to play in changing the status quo by actively sponsoring Black talent in junior, middle and senior levels in their organisation.

## CEOs can make a difference

It is often said there is not a shortage of talent, there is a shortage of opportunity. This is where CEOs can make a difference through either proactive sponsorship or intentional sponsorship. Intentional sponsorship is where leaders are paired with a Black employee of the company with leadership potential and take co-ownership over their career development.

The right sponsorship relationship can be a career game changer for Black talent.

## SPONSORSHIP Vs. MENTORSHIP

What is your understanding and/or experience of ‘sponsorship’?  
 How does this differ from ‘mentorship’ and other supporting relationships you may have?

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Whilst there are some aspects which cross over (ie. making connections, give guidance and provide feedback and advice), the role of a Mentor and a Sponsor are two distinct roles.

Mentors - Advise reactively	Sponsors – Act intentionally
An experienced person who is willing to help and support you.	A senior leader who believes in your potential and takes a personal risk on you
Act as a sounding board	Sponsors are truly invested in the career progression of those they sponsor
Provides a shoulder to cry on, to listen to challenges with empathy	Encourages you to take risks and has your back
Help mentees to develop in an informal or informal setting	Accelerate development and career progression by actively enabling those they sponsor to achieve their career ambitions
Have discussions with their mentees on a number of topics from skill building, confidence, advancing their careers to developing their networks	Use their influence and connections to promote those they sponsor to participate in high profile projects/opportunities and experiences to aid progression
Share their stories and experiences and provide advice, insight, connections and guidance to their mentees	Publicly endorse those they sponsor and actively role model behaviours
Help mentees navigate the unwritten rules of a company	Put their own reputation on the line as they provide access to their networks and platforms to raise the visibility of those they sponsor
Expect little in return	Has a high expectation in terms of performance, skills, and expertise
Mentors will say “Have you thought about speaking at the town hall”	Sponsor will say “I recommend that you speak at the next town hall”

*Consider:* What has been your experience of being sponsored and sponsoring a colleague?

# HOW TO STEP UP INTO SPONSORSHIP OF BLACK TALENT

## 1. Be aware of the need for sponsorship for your Black employees

For many Black employees they will be in the minority in the workplace, looking up and not seeing anyone look like them. This can be isolating for some, they will face microaggressions and racism and often hide these feelings.

Ask yourself these questions

- Do we have Black employees in senior roles?
- Are we attracting Black candidates internally and externally to senior roles?
- Is our talent process inclusive or exclusive of Black talent?
- Is our promotion process inclusive or exclusive of Black talent?
- Are succession plans inclusive or exclusive of Black talent?
- Is our future leaders' pipeline inclusive or exclusive of Black talent?
- Are our leadership programmes and opportunities inclusive or exclusive of Black talent?

The overarching question is;  
How do we ensure we are inclusive of black talent?

*Consider:* Is it Culture & Behaviour or Systems and processes?  
How can you help?

## 2. Accelerate Black Inclusion by championing Sponsorship

- Understand the difference between mentoring and sponsorship to ensure your actions are sponsorship actions
- Speak up about the importance of Sponsorship
- Share your personal experiences of Sponsorship and the impact

Don't see sponsoring Black talent as a risk because they may be quite different to you. Black individuals as a result have to work even harder to prove they are worth the risk. Be inclusive, be open minded, and address your biases.

### 3. Lead by example

Many Black employees more than their white counterparts have little exposure to and interaction with the CEO, CEO direct reports and other senior leaders which can inhibit career prospects.

Have an open door policy

Be genuinely engaged and interested and committed to diversity and inclusion

Invest in the development and growth of your Black talent, get to know them, support them, challenge them and ultimately promote them

Be visible, be present and be vocal in respect of sponsoring Black talent. Do you have black employees on your direct team? Why not?

Adopt a “pay it forward” mindset – someone helped you – so how can you help another

### 4. Start talent spotting Black employees

Excellent sponsors are always on the lookout for talent and encourage leaders to do the same. Whilst you should be looking for good performers (not performers on paper remember if the system is flawed and bias prevalent then performance on paper alone not a good indicator.)

Who is exceeding your expectations?

Has a different perspective and holding their own?

Who has impact?

Who is being overlooked?

How well do you know your Black employees? Its easy to assume they face the same challenges as you or other Black colleagues, but don't assume, get talking, get connecting.

*Tip:* Find out who their line manager is, talk to them, tell them you have spotted X individual as high potential. It's all about getting insights to be a more effective sponsor.

*Consider:* Whose shoulder do you tap and whose shoulder do you not tap? Why?

## 5. Be prepared to have uncomfortable conversations

In an ideal world stepping up into sponsorship should be plain sailing, but it won't always be. Be prepared to have uncomfortable conversations and be prepared to listen.

A willingness to 'talk about race' can strengthen the relationship, and increase the chances for career success for the individual you are sponsoring.

Feedback is essential and should not be avoided with Black colleagues for fear of saying the wrong thing. Feedback should always be constructive and specific and based on knowledge, skills, behaviours Black individuals need to succeed.

*Tip:* You are looking here to understand your blind-spots and also help remove them

## 6. Have effective conversations

Even if you are sponsoring off your own back or through a formal route, there is no point sponsoring anyone if you don't know where they want to be. After all it is a huge personal investment of your time, resources, networks, reputation etc.

Sponsorship is a two way relationship. Think about asking questions such as these;

What role do you want to do? What are your aspirations?

What are you doing well that is helping you on the way to get where you need to be?

What are you not doing well that is stopping you from getting where you need to be?

What if anything is holding you back?

*Key question, for many Black employees you might hear lived experiences positive or negative. Listen without judgment and act with courage.*

If you had the opportunity tomorrow to bring you one step closer to that senior role, what would you do today to be ready for that opportunity?

*Tip:* It is difficult to speak up for do someone you don't know, having difficult and effective conversations are crucial to being an effective sponsor.

In points 5 and 6, as a sponsor you are in essence collaborating with the individuals you sponsor, at the same time getting to know them. For some Black individuals they will find this hard, as they may not have experience of opening up to someone who does not look like them or have similar lived experiences etc. This is why trust and building the relationship is important.

The additional benefit for you as the sponsor is that it will help you clearly identify where you might be able to apply your 'sponsor capital' most effectively.

Win Win!!

### ■ Key behaviours for effective sponsorship relationships

Openness  
Honesty  
Trust  
Listening  
Communication  
Commitment  
Respect  
Cultural Intelligence

## ■ WHAT CAN YOU DO TODAY?

A sponsor goes beyond a mentor, who gives career advice.

Here are some key sponsorship acts you can do right now for your talented Black employees.

- Seek out your Black talent and connect with them, get to know them and their work
- Speak their name when they are not around
- Share career goals and aspirations with other leaders, influencers and decision makers
- Endorse them publicly
- Invite and include them in high profile meetings
- Recommend them for promotions, stretch assignments and speaking opportunities
- Coach and support them on their performance

*Tip:* Include sponsorship to your Black inclusion goals and talent goals and to accelerate Black inclusion consider tying your Black inclusion aspirations to executive/senior leader compensation.



Take a look at this case study to see sponsorship in action. There are some reflective food for thought questions at the end.

## Case Study Example

John (CEO) for some time had spotted Angela, a black colleague in Marketing. He was impressed with her in meetings, her presentations, knowledge and expertise and the ideas she put forward. These were not often as the Head of Marketing would often do these, but when Angela stepped in she always stood out to John and he believed to others too.

He had a few conversations with Angela's boss to find out a little more and realised that Angela was a good performer but was not seen as ready to lead on a larger scale. John connected directly with Angela after she gave a presentation to the Board to give her constructive feedback and praise her on her ability to control and lead the room as well as deliver an impactful way forward on a stumbling block they were experiencing. John on the back of this would invite Angela to Marketing meetings and other meetings to add value, support her development and raise her visibility to others.

When the Head of Marketing role came up, he advocated for Angela at his next strategy meeting with his direct reports. He had never done it before, but it felt like the right thing to do. The initial response was "no, she doesn't know enough about the business, we should look outside". But John disagreed and stated his observations and shared some insights on how Angela was already excelling by often stepping up and how her insight and perspectives had opened up avenues not previously seen. More pushbacks followed "She would be reporting into Bob Smith, would she fit with the rest of the team?" John went all out for Angela, insisting to his reports that she be encouraged to apply.

She excelled through the interview process and fast forward a year into the role, and she's been promoted again - this time into the executive level as a Regional Head of Marketing for EMEA and performing at a very high level.

Some reflective questions:

1. What were some of the key behaviours/actions John did as a sponsor?
2. What do you think helped John to be a sponsor for Angela?
3. In this case study do you think Angela knew John was her sponsor?  
What are your thoughts on this?
4. What do you think the relationship could be like between Angela and her boss?
5. What could the impact have been on Angela and the company if John had not sponsored her?
6. What are your thoughts on the comments made by John's colleagues?
7. What are your thoughts on sponsorship overall?

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND SUPPORT

The If Not Now, When? campaign for Black inclusion in business is led by Audeliss Executive Search and INvolve - The Inclusion People.

Our teams have years of experience supporting organisations in diversifying their senior leadership and creating workplaces which are inclusive of Black and ethnically diverse employees.

Should you need any further support with the content of this Toolkit or the practical implement of other D&I commitments then please get in touch.

### Audeliss Executive Search

Audeliss are committed to levelling the playing field for diverse leaders in executive and board appointments. This means taking a new perspective on how we approach the whole recruitment process.

Our Executive Search, Board Practice and Talent Pipelining solutions won't miss the candidates highlighted by a traditional process, but will also engage a range of compelling people outside of the mainstream market map.

In the last 18 months alone we've helped appoint 90% diverse candidates in NED, C-suite and Director positions across various industries, with 63% being women and 49% being ethnic minorities.

[info@audeliss.com](mailto:info@audeliss.com)  
[www.audeliss.com](http://www.audeliss.com)

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executive search

### INvolve - The Inclusion People

INvolve is a consultancy and global network championing diversity and inclusion in businesses.

Through the delivery of programmes, thought leadership and advisory solutions, INvolve helps firms drive cultural change and create inclusive workplaces where any individual can succeed.

- Inclusion Diagnostics & Benchmarking
- Strategy & Advisory
- Training & Workshops
- Talent Development Programmes
- Role Model Lists

[info@involvepeople.org](mailto:info@involvepeople.org)  
[www.involvepeople.org](http://www.involvepeople.org)

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