

# Sponsorship<sup>1</sup> Defined

## The Sponsor

*Sponsors are the persons with legitimate authority over the employees doing the work.* They provide task component clarity when needed, vision or direction usually in the form of goals, consequence management, follow through of work, and resources in the form of time, money, and people. Since all workplaces have a finite amount of resources, *perhaps the most critical resource a Sponsor will provide is time for the Targets to do their task.* Each work task, initiative, or project always has one or, depending on the number of departments involved, multiple sponsors. Therefore, Sponsors exist on all tasks whether they are aware of it or not.

Sponsors, like other key roles, have a definitional meaning. In other words, no matter what the scenario at work and no matter who you are working with, there is always one Sponsor of the work who either is or is not sponsoring effectively.

By definition, the direct boss of whomever you are trying to get work done with IS the Sponsor of that person. Whether they support what you are trying to do is another story.

A note about the word “Sponsor”: The word Sponsor in our – and most – cultures has been used in many ways. Perhaps the most common use of Sponsor is in relation to an event, as in “and now a word from our sponsor.” It is often used to support, promote, champion, or finance someone. I have often thought I should find a less confusing word. I am sticking to the original language in order to honor Conner, the creator of this theory. This interpretation represents my unique adaptation of his work. Please use whatever word you want.

## Two Types of Sponsors

There are two types of Sponsors: Sustaining and Initiating. *The person directly above the person you are interacting with is the **Sustaining Sponsor**.* Sustaining Sponsors, most critical during large-change initiatives and cross-departmental projects, are often neglected. Without their support, employees may not focus on the right tasks, more often out of ignorance than conscious resistance. There are as many sustaining sponsors on a task as there are employees who report to different bosses, as well as layers in between the work and a single sponsor above all people. All Sponsors need to be on-board so they are not inadvertently hurting the effort. The most critical Sustaining Sponsor is whoever is in charge of the people where the work is taking place.

The next type of Sponsor is the Initiating Sponsor. In all large-scale change efforts, if you go up the organizational chart, you will find one person who is over all departments and employees impacted by the change, initiative, or project. *By definition, the **Initiating Sponsor** of any large scale change, project, or initiative is the single boss over all who have tasks to accomplish, all those impacted, and all who will use day-to-day after the implementation.*

Do not be confused by the word “initiating.” This does not necessarily mean that they started, or even condoned, the change, project, or initiative, because it is a definitional reality. In fact, many unaware Initiating Sponsors, unintentionally, may assign competing goals, initiatives, or directives. It is not that they need to know about everything. If a change is large or important enough, however, the Initiating Sponsor needs to have enough knowledge to ensure support for it to be successful. The lack of awareness of these two roles causes untold disruption in the form of confusion, delays, and, ultimately, higher costs.

## **Learn How to Drive Sponsorship**

The major task of the Sponsor is to learn how to provide and drive appropriate sponsorship in order to keep the organization focused and moving towards its vision or goals. They do this by learning what is happening throughout the organization: above, below, and sideways. This takes constant communication and persistence.

*Many Sponsors miss the importance of working across the organization and focus too much on just up and down. The task is to align your work with the groups that you must coordinate with. That means, in our first example, the tension between maintenance mechanic 1 and shift worker 1 depends on how well the maintenance manager and the shift leader talk about what they need from each others departments and employees, and uphold their commitments to each other so that their goals are achieved.*

Beyond this, Sponsors must provide clear expectations to their employees while fostering an environment where accurate data flows. If you are a Sponsor and you get upset at people when they tell you difficult truths, then do not expect them to be forthcoming in the future.

Another key to successful sponsoring is keeping an eye on the amount of work you want the organization or your work team to accomplish. That can mean having the courage to slow down at times so work gets effectively completed, instead of having too many tasks with little or nothing getting done. Effective sponsorship is a never-ending task. Stop focusing on it and you will not get your desired results.

## **The Core Sponsor is Where the Work Take Place**

Based on the above definitions, the core Sponsor is the boss over the person you are working with. If they do not want what you are doing or don't care because they are focused on other things, then your work will suffer. The symptom of this is most likely employees that appear to be resisting. Yet really, they are only focusing on what their direct supervisor has instructed them to do, which may not be what you are trying to accomplish.

Do not waste time here. Instead, think above your situation and *have the right conversations with the right people to align the system.*

One of two things will happen,

1. you will either transform the scenario and get the system aligned so your work can easily take place, or
2. you will learn that it is you who are out of alignment and be able to focus your attention to tasks that are more important to the business goals.

That is right! Many people who think others are resisting are in fact driving tasks that are not aligned to the current business goals.

Wanna learn more about SATA? Read chapters 3, 5, 6, and 11 of *Strategic Organizational Alignment!*

<sup>1</sup>From Chris Crosby's book, *Strategic Organizational Alignment*.