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ARTICLE

How to stop your best managers from storming out the door?

Mentor blacks and whites differently.

The Truth About Mentoring Minorities: *Race Matters*

by David A. Thomas

New sections to guide you through the article:
- ***The Idea in Brief***
- ***The Idea at Work***
- ***Exploring Further. . .***

PRODUCT NUMBER 2209

THE IDEA IN BRIEF

You've hired the best and brightest—only to watch many promising *minority* professionals get mired in middle management and leave, frustrated and angry, for better careers with your competitors.

Why the exodus? It's the **two-tournament system**: According to a recent study, whites tend to fast track early; minorities, after years in middle management. Minority managers who stay motivated during the protracted early stages of their careers—and finally reach the executive level—share a key resource: a strong network of mentors and corporate sponsors who provide instruction, coaching, and—most important—long-term, close developmental support.

The two-tournament system isn't fair. But until it's eradicated, minorities can best advance by building and drawing on a solid mentoring network. They *and* their companies win.

THE IDEA AT WORK

The stark difference in career trajectories of white and minority executives has major implications for high-potential minorities—and their mentors—during each career-development stage:

Stage 1: Entry level to middle management
As minorities watch their white counterparts quickly receive plum assignments and promotions into middle management, many grow discouraged. But *some* remain motivated. How? They forge mentoring relationships with widely diverse individuals who open the door to challenging assignments and expanded responsibilities, sending the message, "These are high performers." Mentors also provide career advice and protect protégés from people leveling unfair criticism.

Result? During this stage, future minority executives evaluate themselves in terms of personal growth, not external rewards. Less concerned with how slowly they're climbing the corporate ladder, they embrace the work itself.

Stage 2: Middle to upper middle management
Promising minorities "catch up" to fast-tracked whites. Through promotions, they deepen and broaden their functional expertise, gaining influence over subordinates who might otherwise be resistant to minority leaders.

Tackling more complex challenges, minorities demonstrate their potential and extend their credibility. By changing functions, requesting special projects, and switching locations, they further enhance their success. At this stage, they extend their mentoring relationships to include powerful corporate-level sponsors.

Stage 3: Upper middle to executive level
Minority and white executives finally converge. Minority managers take on challenges specific to working cross-functionally, learning to think and act more strategically and politically. To further distinguish themselves, they score highly visible successes directly related to the company's core strategy.

They also continue developing their networks of highly placed mentors and sponsors. Their relationships with their immediate bosses become particularly crucial. They establish several new, long-term relationships with other executives as well, both white and minority.

Cross-Race Mentoring Challenges
Cross-race mentoring relationships raise unique challenges. For example, some minority protégés may avoid such relationships so as not to attract scrutiny, spawn peers' resentment, or "sell out" their culture.

But if both parties can build a strong foundation of mutual trust, they'll more likely surmount those challenges. If you're a mentor:

- Openly discuss racial sensitivities. Minorities tend to advance further when their white mentors acknowledge race as a potential barrier.
- See yourself in your protégés—they're like you were, years ago. If you can identify with each other, you'll forge closer relationships.
- If you're unsure whether you're the best role model, help protégés identify other appropriate supporters.

Senior executives often face the challenge of helping promising employees of color break through the glass ceiling. An in-depth study reveals that minority protégés should be mentored very differently than their white counterparts.

The Truth About Mentoring Minorities

RACE MATTERS

by David A. Thomas

Diversity has become a top priority in corporate America. Despite the best intentions, though, many organizations have failed to achieve racial balance within their executive teams. Some have revolving doors for talented minorities, recruiting the best and brightest only to see them leave, frustrated and even angered by the barriers they encounter. Other companies are able to retain high-potential professionals of color only to have them become mired in middle management. Still others have minorities in their executive ranks, but only in racialized positions, such as those dealing with community relations, equal employment opportunity, or ethnic markets.

In my research on the career progression of minorities at U.S. corporations, I have found that whites and minorities follow distinct patterns of advancement. Specifically, promising white professionals tend to enter a fast track early in their careers, whereas high-potential minorities take off much later, typically after they have reached middle management. I've also found that the people of color who advance the furthest all share one characteristic–a strong network of mentors and corporate sponsors who nurture their professional development.

These findings have key implications for mentors – mainly that to be effective, they must fully appreciate all the developmental roles they play (such as that of coach, advocate, and counselor) and understand the importance of each at different stages of their protégé's career. The mentor of a professional of color must also be aware of the challenges race can present to his protégé's career development and advancement. Only then can the mentor help his protégé build a network of relationships with people who can pave the way to the executive level. As a foundation, then, mentors must first understand how people of color tend to climb the corporate ladder.

Minorities in the study who became executives evaluated themselves in terms of personal growth, not external rewards.

Patterns of Movement

In a three-year research project, I studied the career trajectories of minority and white professionals at three major U.S. corporations. The story of one of the participants – Stephen Williams – sheds light on many of the differences in career advancement between whites and minorities. (In the interest of privacy, I have used pseudonyms for the participants. For additional details about the study, see the sidebar "About the Research.")

Williams, an African-American, was born and raised in a middle-class neighborhood in Washington, DC. After earning his bachelor's degree at one of the nation's leading colleges, he began his career as a design engineer at a multibillion-dollar electronics corporation. On his first day in the lab there, he encountered a large banner that read, "George Wallace for President." That proclamation for the pro-segregationist former governor of Alabama was an omen of the uphill battle Williams faced. And yet Williams eventually reached the executive level at his organization. Why did he make it when so many other minorities plateaued in middle management?

First, Williams had the good fortune to be hired by Nathan Barrett, a white manager who continually expanded Williams's responsibilities and advised him on office politics. By the end of his early career, Williams had won additional supporters within the company, including Barrett's boss and several white peers who, when they were promoted to management before Williams, vouched for him with their colleagues and recruited him for plum assignments.

Although it took Williams longer to reach middle management than he thought it should, he avoided becoming cynical even as his white peers were being promoted. Instead, he concentrated on strengthening his technical proficiency, taking numerous in-house courses and seminars. He also chose his assignments judiciously, consciously avoiding being sidetracked into nontechnical or support jobs. Throughout this period, he earned the reputation for being an excellent performer, and he gained the cooperation, respect, and sometimes the friendship of whites who were initially either resistant or hesitant to work with him. After seven years as an engineer, Williams decided to pursue his MBA while continuing to work in engineering and design assignments. The education facilitated his transition into management when he was finally promoted two years later.

Once in middle management, Williams's career took off; he was charged with coordinating the engineering, manufacturing, and field service for ensuring the quality of what was to become a major product family. His success in that position propelled him to a series of other assignments, including a temporary one in strategic planning, that eventually landed him a promotion to vice president and general manager, with profit-and-loss responsibility for a major business unit.

Williams's experiences were typical of the minority executives in my study, which tracked the various stages of career development. Stage 1 covered entry level to middle management. Stage 2 included middle management to upper middle management. (A person in Stage 2 supervised other managers and had responsibility for a functional department within a business unit – for example, the director of marketing or a plant manager.) And Stage 3 covered upper middle management to the executive level. (A person in this stage became a corporate officer or a direct report of a corporate officer, with responsibility for an integrated business unit – a division president, for instance – or leadership of a corporate function – such as a vice president of purchasing.)

The most striking aspect of my findings was the consistency of the data. (See the exhibit "Separate and Unequal.") White professionals who eventually became executives – a group I'll henceforth refer to simply as "white executives" – usually entered a fast track in Stage 1, whereas both white and minority professionals who later plateaued in middle management and minorities who eventually became executives all inched along during that period. In Stages 2 and 3, the careers of minorities

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who ultimately became executives took off, surpassing those of the plateaued managers. This stark difference in the career trajectories of white and minority executives suggests that companies implicitly have two distinct tournaments for access to the top jobs. In the tournament for whites, contenders are sorted early on, and only those deemed most promising proceed to future competition. In the tournament for minorities, the screening process for the best jobs occurs much later. This and other differences have important implications for minority professionals–and for the people mentoring them through the different stages.

Stage 1

According to my research, a pernicious result of the two-tournament system was that many high-potential minorities became discouraged when they failed to be fast-tracked early in their careers. They became demotivated–especially when they saw their white colleagues receive plum assignments and promotions – and de-skilled. As a result, their performance fell to a level that matched their modest rewards.

But some minorities–those who eventually became executives – avoided that fate. What kept them motivated and prepared to take advantage of opportunities that arrived belatedly? A common thread among them was their relationships with mentors. Even though the minority executives were not on an obvious fast track, influential mentors were investing in them as if they were, which helped prevent them from either ratcheting down their performance or simply leaving the organization.

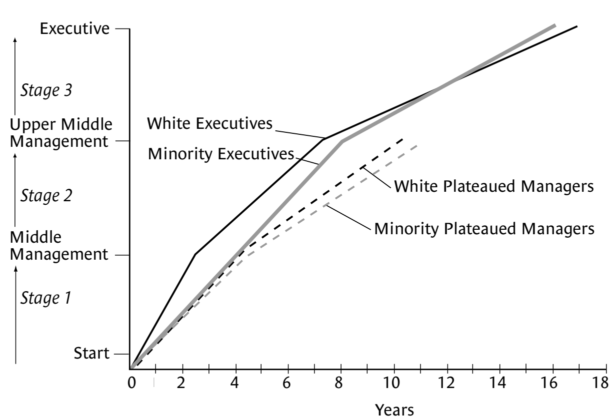
This is not to say that the minorities in the study who became executives didn't experience their share of disappointments; they did. But they evaluated themselves in terms of personal growth, not external rewards. Committed to excellence, they found the process of learning new skills rewarding. Like Williams, many of them went to graduate school or took training courses to enhance their knowledge. In general, minority executives made early career choices that placed them at the leading edge of the work they liked. They were more enthusiastic about the work itself and less concerned with how quickly–or slowly–they were climbing the corporate ladder. In fact, two minority executives in the study actually took demotions to transfer from staff jobs into operations, where they saw a better match for their skills and a greater opportunity for professional growth. Stage 1 was thus a time for minority executives to gain the three C's: confidence, competence, and credibility.

In contrast, minority professionals who subsequently plateaued in middle management tended to make their decisions based on perceived fast-track career opportunities, not on the actual work. They were more prone to take salary and title promotions that offered little increase in management responsibility.

Consider the career of Roosevelt James, a minority electrical engineer at the same company as Stephen Williams. While Williams was focused on engineering and design early in his career, James was motivated more by the prospect of getting into management. He took one transfer after another, accepting nominal promotions, believing they were stepping stones to a larger goal. Before reaching middle management, he had had a total of 12 different assignments (nearly all lateral moves) in seven different functional areas, including those in facilities management and affirmative action. Ironically, to fulfill their ambitions for upward

SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL

White and minority executives do not progress up the corporate ladder in the same way. Early in their careers, high-potential whites enter a fast track, arriving in middle management well before their peers. Promising professionals of color, on the other hand, break through much later, usually after their arrival in middle management. These data are for a multibillion-dollar manufacturer of commodity products; studies at two other large U.S. corporations have shown similar results.



mobility, professionals like James sometimes left the path that might have led to the executive suite.

Interestingly, minority executives were promoted to middle management only slightly faster than minority plateaued managers, but with much greater job continuity. They were much less likely to have changed departments, made lateral moves, or transferred away from core positions. Surprisingly, they even received, on average, fewer promotions within a given level than did minorities who failed to make it past middle management. A close inspection of the data, however, revealed that the promotions of minority managers like James offered little real expansion of responsibilities, as compared with the promotions of minority executives like Williams.

Minority executives attributed much of their later success to their immediate bosses, other superiors, and peers who helped them develop professionally. Of course, such developmental relationships are important for everybody climbing the corporate ladder, regardless of race, but what distinguished minority executives from white executives and plateaued managers was that they had many more such relationships and with a broader range of people, especially in the early years of their careers. Within the first three years at the organization, minority executives had established at least one developmental relationship, usually with a boss or a boss's boss. These mentors provided critical support in five ways.

First, the relationships opened the door to challenging assignments that allowed the minority executives to gain professional competence. Second, by putting the future executives in high-trust positions, the mentors sent a message to the rest of the organization that these people were high performers, thus helping them to gain confidence and establish their credibility. Third, the mentors provided crucial career advice and counsel that prevented their protégés from getting sidetracked from the path leading to the executive level. Fourth, the mentors often became powerful sponsors later in the minority executives' careers, recruiting them repeatedly to new positions. Fifth, the mentors often protected their protégés by confronting subordinates or peers who leveled unfair criticism, especially if it had racial undertones. For example, a superior-performing African-American in the study had a laid-back style that detractors said was an indication of his slacking off, playing on the stereotype that blacks are lazy. The mentor directly challenged the detractors by pointing out that his protégé was the leading salesperson in the division.

Stage 2 can be thought of as a catching-up and breaking-out period for minority executives.

Such rich mentoring relationships enabled minority executives to build on the three C's, despite temptations to become discouraged. It took Williams, for instance, nine years to reach middle management, whereas it took his white counterparts roughly five. In contrast, professionals of color who plateaued in middle management tended to have circumscribed relationships with their mentors, often limited to work-related issues.

In summary, in Stage 1, the winners in the white tournament earned fast promotions into middle management. In the minority tournament, the signals sent to winners were more subtle, taking the form of rich mentoring relationships, challenging assignments, and expanded responsibilities, which showed the rest of the organization that these people merited future investment. (Winners of the white tournament also received those benefits, but the most obvious prizes in that contest were fast promotions.)

Stage 2

Once minority executives entered middle management, they typically had to wait another ten to 15 years before reaching the executive level. But Stage 2 was usually where their careers took off. And without exception, the minority executives in the study vividly recalled that their initial middle-management jobs were critical to their eventual success. Interestingly, few of the white executives felt that way, perhaps because they didn't regard their jobs in early Stage 2 as big opportunities to prove themselves in the same way that their minority counterparts did.

In Stage 2, minority executives continued to increase their functional knowledge, allowing them to deepen and broaden their foundation of the three C's. When leading others, the sheer technical or functional competence they had acquired in Stage 1 often enabled them to influence subordinates who might otherwise have been resistant. Through that process, they were able to enhance their managerial skills and judgment.

Stage 2 was also an important period for the minority executives to apply their existing skills to complex situations, which then helped them to demonstrate their potential and extend their credibility within the larger organization. Because of that, they were able to expand their network of relationships, including those with mentors and sponsors, beyond the boundaries of their original functional groups. Williams, for example, received several assignments in Stage 2 that required him to develop working relationships with key people in other functional areas. By the end of Stage 2, every minority executive in the study had at least one influential executive as a mentor, and many were highly regarded by several executives who acted as sponsors.

The split between minority executives and plateaued managers became more pronounced in Stage 2. Minority executives still received fewer promotions than minority plateaued managers, but they reached upper middle management in less time because their promotions were bigger and more significant. The assignment patterns of the minority managers continued to be unfocused: they had more job changes–either by department, location, or function (especially changes from line to staff jobs)–and they tended to serve in fix-it roles involving the same kind of challenges over and over, with no opportunity to acquire new skills.

The career of Carlos Amado, one of the managers studied, is a case in point. By the end of Stage 1, Amado had acquired a deep expertise in manufacturing. He had also earned a reputation for turning around problem groups and making them into stars. But in Stage 2, he failed to learn other important skills, such as developing the supervisors who reported to him and delegating work, and his career subsequently stagnated. A lack of savvy mentoring probably contributed to Amado's incomplete understanding that he was being boxed into a limited role.

Stage 2 was also when the careers of minority and white executives began to converge – their experiences, assignments, and pace of advancement became increasingly similar. There were still, however, some notable differences. Compared with their white counterparts, minority executives were twice as likely to change functions, twice as likely to take on special projects or task-force assignments, three times as likely to take a turnaround assignment, almost twice as likely to change locations, and four times as likely to report a big success. In many ways, these differences are a reversal of what occurred in Stage 1, where white executives had markedly more opportunities to prove themselves than minority executives did. For that reason, Stage 2 can be thought of as a catching-up and breaking-out period for minority executives.

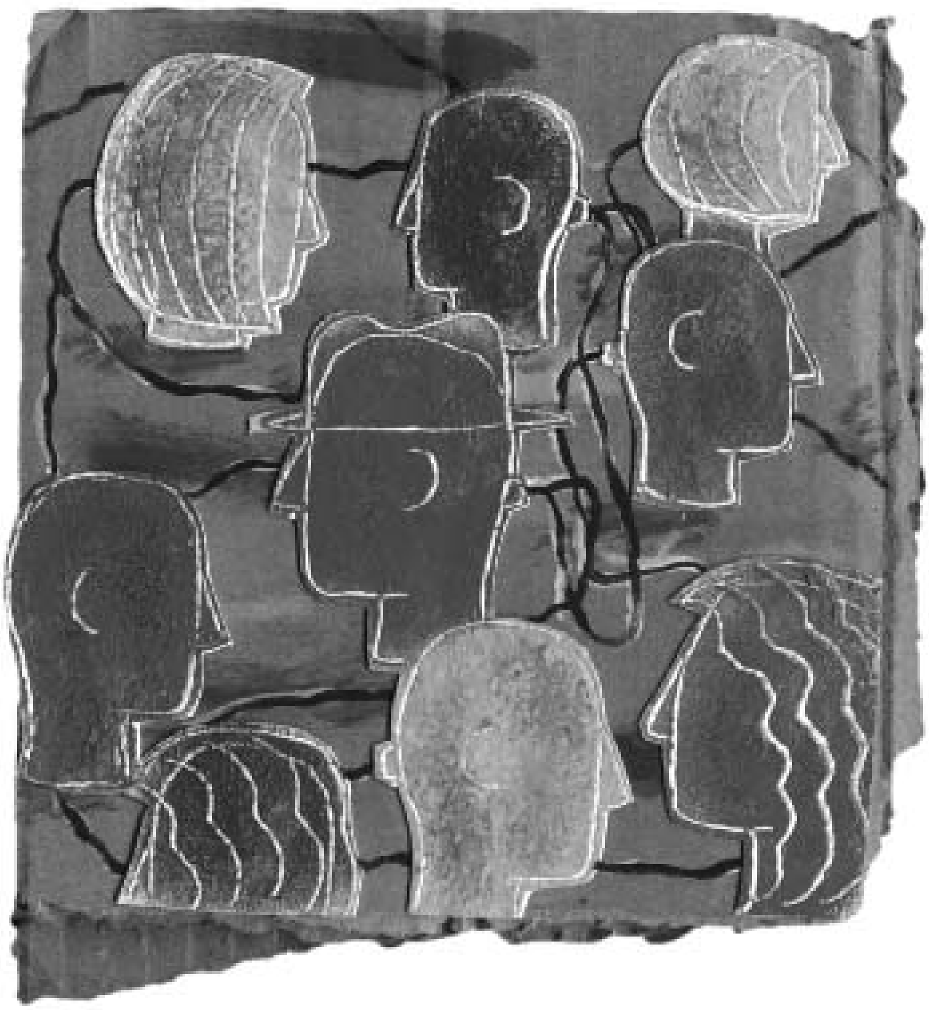
Interestingly, although minority and white executives had a similar number of developmental relationships in Stage 2, minority executives were far more likely to have powerful corporate-level executives as sponsors and mentors. In reviewing their careers, minority executives usually described a senior person who had been watching their progress during this period without their full awareness.

Stage 3

The climb from upper middle management to the executive level required a broad base of experience – well beyond a functional expertise. In Stage 3, people took on issues specific to working across functional boundaries, and that change encouraged them to think and act more strategically and politically.

To distinguish oneself as executive-level material in Stage 3, an individual needed highly visible successes that were directly related to the company's core strategy. For Stephen Williams, it was his critical role in developing and launching a product line that helped to reposition his company in the marketplace.

Minority executives in Stage 3 continued developing their network of highly placed mentors and sponsors. An individual's relationship with his executive boss, in



particular, became crucial; it played a central role in helping each minority executive break through to the highest level. Furthermore, in Stage 3 the minority executives reported developing at least two new relationships with other executives. In contrast, most of the minority plateaued managers did not establish any new developmental relationships during that time.

The networks of minority executives were also much more diverse than those of the minority managers. For example, African-American managers who plateaued either relied almost exclusively on members of their own racial group for key developmental support or they relied predominantly on whites. In contrast, those who reached the executive level, especially the most successful among them, had built genuine, personal long-term relationships with both whites and African-Americans.

The careers of minority and white executives continued to converge in Stage 3, especially with regard to developmental relationships. Clearly, it was impossible to make it to the executive level, regardless of race, without the active advocacy of an immediate boss and at least one other key sponsor or mentor. Nevertheless, as was the case in Stage 2, minority executives tended to have a higher proportion of their developmental relationships with the corporate elite than did white executives.

In summary, during Stages 2 and 3, the careers of minority executives became clearly differentiated from that of plateaued managers, and in Stage 3, the career trajectories and experiences of minority and white executives finally converged.

Mentoring Challenges

A key finding of this research is that professionals of color who plateaued in management received mentoring that was basically instructional; it helped them develop better skills. Minority executives, by contrast, enjoyed closer, fuller developmental relationships with their mentors. This was particularly true in people's early careers, when they needed to build confidence, credibility, and competence. That is, purely instructional mentoring was not sufficient; protégés needed to feel connected to their mentors.

Specifically, a mentor must play the dual role of coach and counselor: coaches give technical advice – explaining how to do something – while counselors talk about the experience of doing it and offer emotional support. Both are crucial. If a protégé doesn't have someone to talk to about his experiences in the organization, he will often have trouble implementing any coaching advice. This is especially true early in a person's career, when the instructional advice requires him to assume behaviors that he is not yet comfortable with. Later in the protégé's career, particularly in Stages 2 and 3, the mentor must focus on establishing and expanding a network of relationships, including sponsorship and connections to people who are higher in the organization. While the quality of the interpersonal relationships remains important, the diversity of the network becomes another crucial factor.

Many people, however, do not approach mentoring from a developmental perspective. They don't understand how to work with subordinates, especially minorities, to prepare them for future opportunities. My own experience and the findings of other studies suggest that organizations can change this by educating managers about their developmental role and by teaching them how to mentor effectively. Of prime importance is an understanding of the kinds of developmental relationships that people need at different points in their careers. Also crucial is an appreciation that, because race and racism can pose significant obstacles for people of color, mentors of minorities may need to approach mentoring differently than they do with their white protégés.

Cross-Race Issues. This education process must include an awareness of the inherent difficulties of mentoring across race. A significant amount of research shows that cross-race (as well as cross-gender) relationships can have difficulty forming, developing, and maturing. Nevertheless, the mentoring of minority professionals must often be across race, as it was for most of the minority executives in my study. And to develop the personal connections that are the foundation of a good mentoring relationship, the participants must overcome the following potential obstacles.

Negative Stereotypes. Mentors must be willing to give their protégés the benefit of the doubt: they invest in their protégés because they expect them to succeed. But a potential mentor who holds negative stereotypes about an individual, perhaps based on race, might withhold that support until the prospective protégé has proven herself worthy of investment. (Such subtle racism may help explain why none of the minority professionals in my study had been fast-tracked. Whites were placed on the fast track based on their perceived potential, whereas people of color had to display a proven and sustained record of solid performance – in effect, they often had to be overprepared – before they were placed on the executive track.)

On the other hand, when a person of color feels that he won't be given the benefit of the doubt, he behaves in certain ways – for example, he might not take risks he should for fear that if he fails, he will be punished disproportionately.

Identification and Role Modeling. Close mentoring relationships are much more likely to form when both parties see parts of themselves in the other person: the protégé sees someone whom he wants to be like in the future. The mentor sees someone who reminds him of himself years ago. This identification process can help the mentor see beyond a protégé's rough edges. But if the mentor has trouble identifying with his protégé – and sometimes differences in race are an obstacle – then he might not be able to see beyond the protégé's weaknesses. Furthermore, when the mentoring relationship is across race, the mentor will often have certain limitations as a role model. That is, if the protégé adopts the behavior of the mentor, it might produce different results. In my study, an African-American participant recounted how his white mentor encouraged him to adopt the mentor's more aggressive style. But when the protégé did so, others labeled him an "angry black man."

Skepticism About Intimacy. At companies without a solid track history of diversity, people might question whether close, high-quality relationships across race are possible. Does the mentor, for example, have an ulterior motive, or is the protégé selling out his culture?

Public Scrutiny. Because cross-race relationships are rare in most organizations, they tend to be more noticeable, so people focus on them. The possibility of such scrutiny will often discourage people from participating in a cross-race relationship in the first place.

Peer Resentment. A protégé's peers can easily become jealous, prompting them to suggest or imply that the protégé does not deserve whatever benefits he's received. Someone who fears such resentment might avoid forming a close relationship with a prospective mentor of another race. Of course, peer resentment occurs even with same-race mentorships, but it is a much greater concern in cross-race relationships because of their rarity.

Such obstacles often hinder cross-race mentoring from reaching its full potential. In my research, I have found that they make people less willing to open up about sensitive issues and more afraid of disagreements and confrontations. The general sense is that cross-race relationships are more fragile.

Not surprisingly, many cross-race mentoring relationships suffer from "protective hesitation": both parties refrain from raising touchy issues. For example, Richard Davis, a white mentor in my study, thought that his African-American protégé's style was abrasive, but he kept that feeling to himself in order to avoid any suggestion that he was prejudiced – specifically that he harbored the stereotype that all black men are brash and unpolished. Davis eventually found out that he was right when his protégé's style became an issue with others. At that point, though, his protégé was deemed to have a problem – one that could have been prevented had Davis only spoken sooner.

Protective hesitation can become acute when the issue is race – a taboo topic for many mentors and protégés. People believe that they aren't supposed to talk about race; if they have to discuss it, then it must be a problem. But that mind-set can cripple a relationship. Consider, for example, a protégé who thinks that a client is giving him a difficult time because of his race but keeps his opinion to himself for fear that his mentor will think he has a chip on his shoulder. Had the protégé raised the issue, his mentor might have been able to nip the problem early on. The mentor, for instance, might have sent the protégé to important client meetings alone, thereby signaling that the protégé has the backing of his mentor and the authority to make high-level decisions.

The above example highlights an important finding from my research: minorities tend to advance further when their white mentors understand and acknowledge race as a potential barrier. Then they can help their protégés deal effectively with some of those obstacles. In other words, relationships in which protégé and mentor openly discuss racial issues generally translate into greater opportunity for the protégé.

To encourage and foster that type of mentoring, organizations can teach people, especially managers, how to identify and surmount various race-related difficulties. For example, a white mentor might make a concerted effort to communicate to her minority protégé that she has already given him the benefit of the doubt. In a meeting, she could openly endorse his good ideas, thereby signaling to others that they, too, should value his opinions. Such actions would curb the protégé's fear of failure and encourage him to take risks and speak about difficulties.

And consider the practice of role modeling. If a mentor accepts that he might be limited in his ability to serve as a role model, he can help his protégé identify other appropriate people. He can also offer open-ended advice, perhaps by using qualifying comments ("This might not work for you, but from my experience…") and invite discussion of the advice rather than assume it will be taken. Otherwise, the mentor might easily misconstrue situations when his advice isn't taken, which could make the mentor feel slighted and possibly even cause him to abandon the relationship.

It should be noted that when the complexities of cross-race relationships are handled well, they can strengthen a relationship. For one thing, if a mentor and protégé trust each other enough to work together in dealing with touchy race-related issues, then they will likely have a sturdy foundation to handle other problems. In fact, people have reported that race differences enabled them to explore other kinds of differences, thus broadening the perspectives of both parties. That education was invalu-

Many cross-race mentoring relationships suffer from "protective hesitation": both parties refrain from raising touchy issues.

able because people who can fully appreciate the uniqueness of each individual are more likely to be better managers and leaders. Indeed, in my research on cross-race mentoring, mentors have frequently reported those relationships were the most fulfilling in terms of their own growth and transformation.

Network Management. As discussed earlier, one of a mentor's key tasks is to help the protégé build a large and diverse network of relationships. The network must be strong enough to withstand even the loss of the mentor. Stephen Williams's mentor, for example, left the company after Williams had entered Stage 3 and was tackling increasingly challenging assignments.

From my research, I have found that the most effective network is heterogeneous along three dimensions. First, the network should have functional diversity; it should include mentors, sponsors, role models, peers, and even people whom the protégés themselves might be developing mentoring relationships toward. Second, the network should have variety with respect to position (seniors, colleagues, and juniors) as well as location (people within the immediate department, in other departments, and outside the organization). And third, the network should be demographically mixed in terms of race, gender, age, and culture.

Organizations should provide a range of career paths, uncorrelated with race, that lead to the executive suite.

Although a detailed description of the three dimensions is beyond the scope of this article, several points are worth noting. The difference between mentorship and sponsorship is that the former entails a much closer personal connection. Sponsors are coaches and advocates, whereas mentors are also counselors, friends, and in many ways surrogate family. Nevertheless, the role of sponsors can be critical when, for example, the protégé wants to pursue an opportunity outside the mentor's department. Also, especially when key decisions at an organization are made by committee, the protégé will benefit from having as many sponsors as possible.

A frequently overlooked area is a protégé's relationships with peers. People of color, in particular, can oftentimes become isolated from their peers due to resentment. But peer networks are crucial. For one thing, peers can help one another manage their careers and perform important self-assessments. They can be sympathetic sounding boards, useful information checks (what was your experience like when you first started in that division?), and helpful devil's advocates. For Stephen Williams, participation in a self-help group of African-Americans at his organization provided valuable social support and also expanded his network beyond his association with his engineering colleagues.

To ensure that a protégé is not missing any important peer relationships, the mentor must sometimes intervene. For example, if a mentor notices that his protégé is not part of an informal go-to-lunch crowd, he might assign her to a certain project with people in that group to encourage those friendships to form.

Another often overlooked area is a protégé's relationships with juniors, which will help the protégé become a valuable mentor in the future. Also, particularly for people in middle management, good relationships with junior staff can enable them to stay up-to-date with the latest technology. Furthermore, a protégé's mentors and superiors can be influenced greatly by the opinions of junior staff.

A network of relationships becomes vulnerable when it lacks any one of the dimensions. For example, if a person's network is limited to his organization, he will find it difficult to find employment elsewhere. On the other hand, people of color have the tendency to draw on a network from primarily outside their organizations. Such support can be invaluable, but it will provide little help when that individual is being considered for a highly desirable in-house assignment. Establishing a diverse network is just the start – a person's network must be replenished and modified continually.

Creating the Environment for Success

Many mentors of minority professionals assume that their job begins and ends with the one-on-one relationships they establish with their protégés. This is hardly true. Mentors, especially those at the executive level, must do much more by actively supporting broader efforts and initiatives at their organizations to help create the conditions that foster the upward mobility of people of color. Specifically, they can do the following:

- Ensure that the pool of people being considered for promotions and key assignments reflects the diversity in the organization.
- Promote executive development workshops and seminars that address racial issues.
- Support in-house minority associations, including networking groups.
- Help colleagues manage their discomfort with race. In a meeting to decide whether someone of color should be promoted, for example, a person can help focus the discussion on the individual's actual performance while discounting racial issues disguised as legitimate concerns

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

My three-year research project took place at three major U.S. corporations: a manufacturer of commodity products, an electronics company, and a high-tech firm. At these multibillion-dollar organizations, I conducted in-depth case studies of 20 minority executives, predominantly African-Americans but also Asian- and Hispanic-Americans. For comparison purposes, I also conducted in-depth studies of 13 white executives as well as 21 nonexecutives (people who had plateaued in middle management), both white and minority, from the same companies. In addition, I reviewed the promotion records of more than 500 managers and executives at one of the companies studied.

Each corporation in the study had a long history of commitment to diversity. Amid the civil rights environment of the 1960s and early 1970s, all had strongly supported both affirmative action and equal employment opportunities. Their civic and community involvement helped their initial efforts to recruit minorities for professional and managerial positions. By the early 1990s, these companies had achieved racial integration within their management ranks.

Some people have questioned my decision to study only companies with a good track record in terms of diversity. The reason is simple: I felt that these companies would have more to teach us about how minority executives could succeed – even given various obstacles. I do not, however, mean to gloss over the very real – and sometimes insurmountable – barriers that many nonwhites face in their quest for advancement in corporate America. Indeed, there are still many companies at which no amount of individual effort, preparation, or performance is likely to propel a person of color into an executive position.

(such as vague criticisms that the managerial style of the minority candidate "doesn't fit in").

- Challenge implicit rules, such as those that assume that people who weren't fast movers early in their careers will never rise to the executive suites.

In conclusion, I should address one of the most insidious implicit rules of all: the two-tournament model. Many companies might be tempted to accept it as an empirical reality. Some might even want to make it policy by tacitly accepting that minorities cannot be fast-tracked in their early careers or by formally creating two separate career tournaments – one for whites and one for minorities. They assume that minorities will move more slowly in Stage 1. So, the thinking goes, why not take that time to ensure that high-potential minorities are overprepared to meet the social, technical, and racial challenges when they reach Stage 2?

I believe that any acceptance – let alone conscious replication – of the two-tournament system is a mistake. First, it unfairly institutionalizes the "tax" of added time that minorities have to pay as a result of existing racial barriers. As a consequence, a higher standard is set for their participation in the main competition for executive jobs. Second, such a policy would likely result in a number of high-performing and ambitious minorities leaving in Stage 1, before their careers could accelerate. It was beyond the scope of my study to determine exactly how many people of color with executive potential left during Stage 1, but I did encounter many executives who were surprised when their best minority talent left "just as good things were about to happen." Lastly, a two-tournament model could eventually lead to backlash among white plateaued managers who, not realizing that they had been passed over in Stage 1 because they were not deemed executive material, become resentful toward the promising minorities taking off in Stages 2 and 3.

But I am not advocating a one-tournament system of fast-tracking. After all, it is no accident that people of color haven't been fast-tracked in the past. One reason is that organizations have been largely ineffective in helping minorities establish relationships with mentors. Thus, artificially placing minority professionals onto a fast track without first changing the underlying process dynamics would set up those individuals for failure.

Organizations instead should provide a range of career paths, all uncorrelated with race, that lead to the executive suite. Ideally, this system of movement would allow variation across all groups – people could move at their own speed through the three stages based on their individual strengths and needs, not their race. Achieving this system, however, would require integrating the principles of opportunity, development, and diversity into the fabric of the organization's management practices and human resource systems. And an important element in the process would be to identify potential mentors, train them, and ensure that they are paired with promising professionals of color.

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ARTICLES

"The Best of Intentions" by John Humphreys (*Harvard Business Review*, July 2002, Product no. R0207A)

This fictional case study provides a closer look at the challenges facing minority professionals and their mentors. Cynthia, a manager at a financial services company, wants to hire Steve—an African-American, and this year's top trainee—to revive sales in a mostly white customer district. But Peter, Cynthia's boss, is concerned that the white customers wouldn't be comfortable with a black salesperson. Peter recommends starting Steve out in a more hospitable district: "Once the right opportunity opens up, he'll be hired, and he'll do brilliantly."

Four experts comment on Cynthia's dilemma. David A. Thomas, for example, suggests hiring Steve and then setting him up with a list of prospective clients who'll be pleased to know they're considered "desirables." If any client balks, Cynthia should counter with "This is our best person." She should also let the other sales reps know of Steve's excellence, and help him attend the right events to shape others' expectations.

Herman Morris, Jr., another expert, agrees. He adds that Cynthia should be up-front with Steve about the challenge he's taking on. Through daily coaching, she must show Steve the ropes and stand up for him if needed. With that kind of support, Steve has a good shot at long-term success.

***Priming Employees for Superior Performance* (*Harvard Business Review* OnPoint Collection, September 2002, Product no. 175X)**

This collection broadens the focus to mentoring in general, with particular emphasis on techniques that can help managers encourage superior performance from employees. As the authors explain, a manager's expectations may exert the most powerful influence on employees' performance: When you expect the best, you usually get it. And when you expect the worse, you often get that, too.

To set a positive self-fulfilling prophecy in motion, clearly communicate your high expectations of employees. If people don't perceive your expectations, they can't fulfill them. Also, take special care with rookie managers. In particular, don't expect them to learn basic management skills, such as delegating, focusing on the big picture, and asking for help, by osmosis. Finally, take care how you deliver critical feedback. Though you might dread this duty, you can boost your chances of inspiring employees to achieve their best by learning how to deliver feedback effectively.

The collection includes the articles "Pygmalion in Management" by J. Sterling Livingston, "Saving Your Rookie Managers from Themselves" by Carol A. Walker, and "A Better Way to Deliver Bad News" by Jean-François Manzoni.