

The Power Of Lifting Women:

WHY SPONSORSHIP MATTERS

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Early in 2026, I experienced one of the most fulfilling moments of my career.

It wasn't a keynote speech I delivered in front of hundreds, or a win in the boardroom that resulted in one more woman on a board.

In fact, it wasn't an achievement of mine at all. It was the moment I sat in the audience watching my dear friend Vinny receive her FCPA.

Being named a Fellow Chartered Professional Accountant (FCPA) is the highest honour our profession can bestow. It is a recognition by peers of outstanding leadership, professional excellence, and unwavering commitment to stewardship and service. And I can think of no one more deserving of the honour than my longtime friend and colleague Vinny Bhathal.

That's why I was proud to formally support her nomination, and even prouder to see her receive the credential at the CPA Ontario gala in January.

In that moment, I felt the undeniable joy and satisfaction that comes from lifting others. Watching Vinny beam as she accepted the well-deserved recognition was just as fulfilling, if not more, than receiving an accolade myself.

Throughout my journey as an entrepreneur and corporate director, I often reflect on what it means to lead with purpose. Last year, as I set my intentions, I committed to making "lift" one of my guiding principles.

The reason? I wanted to use my knowledge, experience, and connections to uplift other women. It is part of my philosophy for the "third chapter" of my career. While the first chapter focused on building my

expertise and the second on stepping into leadership roles, I have dedicated my third chapter to supporting others.

Lifting others isn't just a feel-good phrase—it's not about personal gratification. It's a choice to consistently stand as an ally for those facing obstacles. In 2026, such allies are essential to supporting the success of the next generation of women leaders.

The Power of Three

When we discuss empowering women, we should aim for the "Power of Three". In any boardroom or committee, one woman is a token, two are a presence, but three are a voice. It's not until we reach this critical mass that we can challenge gendered assumptions about performance and pay.

I've dedicated the third chapter of my career to increasing women's representation in the boardroom because I know from experience just how vital our voices are. Research shows that companies with more women in senior roles are 21% more likely to outperform their competitors on profitability. When we support women in leadership, we all benefit.

Lifting Yourself First

If you aim to lift others, where should you start? Believe it or not, the best place to begin is with yourself. Although it may seem counterintuitive, I have discovered that when you first elevate yourself, you are better positioned to provide meaningful support to those around you. Prioritizing self-care and education is not selfish; it is vital for living a purposeful life and being at your best when others need you most. To effectively support others, you must first ensure you are standing on solid ground.

Lifting yourself can take many forms. Naturally, I invest in my governance education and continue my professional development as a CPA. However, I also believe in prioritizing wellness outside of work. That is why I trained to become a yoga teacher many years ago and still practice today, go for daily walks along the south shores of Lake Erie, and make time in my schedule for family and friends.

Five Strategies for Lifting Others

I see lifting others as a key part of being an ally. One of the most effective ways you can support those facing barriers is by taking concrete steps to help them reach their potential.

Throughout my leadership journey, I have identified five key strategies to support others as an ally.

Be Present: As an experienced yoga practitioner, I see mindfulness as a leadership tool. By genuinely paying attention to others' thoughts and experiences, you provide essential support.

Show Appreciation: Publicly acknowledge achievements. At the social purpose company I founded, Women Get On Board (WGOB), one of our main focuses is highlighting our members' board appointments across our platforms.

Share Opportunities: If an opportunity—such as a board seat—doesn't suit you, recommend three other women to fill that role.

Stay Positive: In the high-stakes world of entrepreneurship, acting as a "cheerleader" and providing optimism during difficult times is a powerful way to uplift a peer.

Offer Guidance: Share your experience through mentorship. A mentor can provide

meaningful advice to support and inspire future leaders.

Building More Elevators

While I support mentorship, I also believe that individual efforts have their limits. When I speak with leaders, I often ask, "What's the difference between sending the elevator down and building more elevators?"

Sending the elevator down is manual work; it assists one person at a time. Building elevators involves creating lasting infrastructure that continues to support hundreds of women even when you're no longer involved. This is the essence of "Third Chapter" leadership—developing systems that outlast us.

Two of the "elevators" I've built are the WGOB Mentorship Program—which connects aspiring women board members with leading and serving board directors—and the Deborah Rosati Women in Leadership Mentorship Program—which provides support and advice to women at Brock University. The infrastructure I have established has already achieved far more than I could have as a mentor alone.

The Shift to Sponsorship

I also believe we need to push further. Mentorship has reached its limit in influencing board diversity. Many women receive more mentorship than they need but lack enough sponsorship.

The key differences between mentorship and sponsorship are related to visibility, risk, and the level of support offered.

Visibility: Mentorship takes place privately, providing a discreet space for guidance and advice. In contrast, sponsorship is public, leveraging one's influence and social capital to openly support

and advocate for someone.

Nature of Support: A mentor offers guidance and advice, whereas a sponsor takes action. While a mentor might suggest that a woman show patience, a sponsor actively works to position her in a specific role, such as a board seat.

Level of Risk: Sponsorship is deemed costly because it risks the sponsor's reputation and credibility. When sponsoring someone, the individual is effectively saying, "I vouch for this person with my credibility." Since social capital is limited, one can mentor many people but can only sponsor a few.

Tangible Commitment: Sponsorship demands genuine commitment—specifically the sponsor's time, reputation, and social capital. It involves concrete actions such as recommending a qualified woman to a board, supporting her for a committee chair position, or serving as an open public reference.

The difference is simple. Mentorship happens behind closed doors, while sponsorship is visible to everyone. A mentor provides advice; a sponsor invests social capital to support you. Mentorship may lead to future opportunities indirectly, but sponsorship can boost your career right away.

While mentorship remains valuable, its effectiveness in promoting board diversity has stalled. To achieve meaningful progress, we need more sponsors willing to invest their social capital to ensure that qualified women are given leadership opportunities.

I encourage every director to support sponsorship. Use your influence to help a qualified woman attain a leadership role. When a board seat becomes available, suggest

three women to fill it. When you see a woman excelling in a board role, recommend her for a key committee, such as compensation or audit, where significant decision-making power exists.

Give to Gain

This year, the theme of International Women's Day was Give To Gain. As someone who has spent a decade amplifying women's voices in the boardroom, I understand the vital role that generosity and reciprocity play in advancing women.

Moving forward, I invite you to consider how you can Give To Gain. What steps can you take to create meaningful change and open doors for women leaders? Are you in a position to offer advice, mentorship, resources, visibility, platforms, or sponsorship to support someone's journey to a corporate board seat? Are you willing to publicly speak up and risk your reputation to help more women enter the boardroom?

Lifting others involves more than just offering advice. It requires intentional effort, the creation of lasting support systems, and the courage to risk your standing for someone else.

When we "Give to Gain," the collective impact becomes exponential. Together, we have the power to become unbreakable.

