

Christin Wiedemann, (then-Chief Scientist and Co-CEO of Professional Quality Assurance Limited in Vancouver) and Ottawa-based Namir Anani, (then-President and CEO of the Information and Communications Technology Council) were one of the Protégé Projects inaugural teams. They described their experiences in the program with WCT in this Q&A interview.

What is the difference between mentorship and sponsorship?

Namir: Mentorship is about being a source of advice, sharing lessons learnt, and guidance to tackle career challenges, while sponsorship involves a planning and positioning strategy to advance a career objective by being an ambassador and an advocate on behalf of the protégée. As a sponsor, you're called upon to seize the opportunities for the protégée by leveraging your circles, networks, and other potential channels to advance the protégée's career objectives.

Christin: That's right, a sponsor is someone who actively promotes you with the outspoken goal of helping you advance your career.

How did you define the objectives of your Protégé engagement?

Namir: We started initially by having a better understanding of each other's skills, experiences, networks, and aspirations. This was done over the first two weeks of the engagement.

Christin: In our first meeting, we set up a framework for how we would work together, and we agreed on a set of goals for the engagement.

Namir: Then we started to explore current opportunities that were before us that we could leverage such as key conferences, networking opportunities, relevant meetings, presentations, others. Once this was done we had a clear understanding of what could be achieved and set out goals for the year ahead.

Christin: In each monthly meeting, we tried to make progress towards those goals, and we took detailed meeting notes with action items to make sure we stayed on track. Distance was never an issue – we used Skype to set up video conference meeting, but we also had the opportunity to meet in person.

Namir: Yes, we had a chance to personally meet in Vancouver while I was on business travel in BC, and also when Christin joined me at the Telecom Conference in Toronto where we planned for a larger networking opportunity with key executives in the digital and media space.



What were the outcomes of your Protégé engagement?

Christin: Namir introduced me to organizations, projects, conferences, meetings and people I didn't know of before. My network has expanded, but I have also identified initiatives that align with my company's goals, and that I'm actively pursuing or participating in.

I was promoted to co-CEO in April of 2015. It was my boss who told me about the Protégé program and encouraged me to apply. Having access to Namir as a career sponsor made the transition into the co-CEO role smoother and less intimidating. For me the timing was just perfect - there couldn't have been a better time for me to have an executive sponsor than as I was moving into a much bigger role than I'd ever had before!

Namir: The engagement certainly gave me a deeper sense of appreciation for the challenges faced by women leaders in their quest to achieve their career aspirations. Christin is certainly a gem that any top company would want to have leading their organization.

Christin: It was great for me and it was great for the company too. Namir helped me refine and expand our sales pitch. Through long discussions around my company's value proposition, and industry needs and trends, I arrived at a succinct pitch that I continue using when presenting our company's services and the value we add.

Namir: We took care to ensure that the goals we set were beneficial for both Christin and her company. It was important if she was going to invest the time and effort in attending a conference in Toronto to meet with key leaders, that the opportunity, while meaningful for her career aspirations, was also business growth opportunity for her company.

Would you recommend a Protégé engagement for other executive sponsors?

Christin: Absolutely. It presents a unique opportunity to get paired with an executive sponsor you would otherwise not have access to. I also appreciate how the protégés and sponsors are matched. If I picked my own sponsor I would likely pick someone that is like me, with similar background and experiences, but also similar strengths and weaknesses. Having someone else select a sponsor for you, means you are more likely to be challenged, and you'll have a more powerful learning experience.

Furthermore, the program is very well structured and managed, which I think is key for its success, and for the protégés to enjoy the full benefits of it.

Namir: It's a great experience for sponsors too. A sponsorship engagement is more than connecting protégés with career opportunities, its about seeing the brilliance in others, and to



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help them see the potential within. In doing so you meet great talent that will also inspire you in your own career journey.