

Association Executives of North Carolina

Success *Live*

BY ASSOCIATION

The below educational content of this edition of *Success by Association Live* is sponsored by **Riverfront Convention Center of Craven County & Jordan Price Law Offices.**



[Click to Listen
to the Article](#)





**Work has
never looked
so *good*.**

Plan your next conference at
our riverfront facility and you'll
find all the amenities you need for
a new way of doing business.

 New Bern

203 S Front Street New Bern, NC
(252) 637-1551
www.RiverfrontConventionCenter.com





**EXPERIENCED LEGAL
AND LEGISLATIVE
COUNSEL FOR TRADE
AND PROFESSIONAL
ASSOCIATIONS**

CONTACT US:

1951 CLARK AVENUE
RALEIGH, NC 27605
919.828.2501
JORDANPRICE.COM

The Untapped Power of Sponsorship in Leadership Development

Sertrice Shipley

Click [here](#) to listen to the article instead!

July 1, 2026

For years, professionals have been told that mentorship is the key to career success. From early career coaching to executive leadership advice, mentorship is often seen as a necessary stepping stone for professional growth.

But mentorship alone isn't enough.

Despite widespread mentorship programs in organizations, women, people of color, and other underrepresented professionals continue to face barriers to advancement. Why? Because mentorship, while valuable, doesn't always translate into tangible career opportunities.

[Research](#) shows that employees with sponsors are 23-30% more likely to be promoted than those who only have mentors.

What's missing is **sponsorship**.

Mentorship vs. Sponsorship: What's the Difference?

Both mentorship and sponsorship play important roles in professional development, but they are not the same.

Mentorship focuses on guidance, advice, and career development. A mentor helps someone navigate workplace challenges, learn new skills, and build confidence.

Sponsorship focuses on advocacy, opportunity, and career advancement. A sponsor actively champions their protégé, speaking their name in rooms they're not in, advocating for promotions, and opening doors to leadership opportunities.

A mentor helps you prepare for the big game, but a sponsor gets you off the bench and onto the field.

Why Mentorship Alone Falls Short

Most companies invest heavily in mentorship programs, yet they still struggle to increase diversity in leadership roles.

That's because mentorship, while great for skill-building, doesn't necessarily lead to career movement. Employees need someone who will actively advocate for them—not just give advice.

For underrepresented professionals, sponsorship is especially critical. Without sponsorship, they may remain unseen by decision-makers, even if they're highly qualified.

The result is a career bottleneck where employees receive plenty of advice but few real opportunities.



What's Next?

So, how do companies bridge the gap between mentorship and sponsorship?

The key is intentionality—creating structured sponsorship programs that help underrepresented employees access leadership opportunities.

By making sponsorship a priority, organizations can build stronger leadership pipelines, retain top talent, and create more equitable career opportunities. It's time to move beyond mentorship and take action.

HEAR MORE FROM SERTRICE SHIPLEY AT THE UPCOMING 2026 AENC ANNUAL MEETING, 9:00AM, MONDAY, JULY 27TH, 2026, in Concord, NC. [DETAILS & REGISTER HERE.](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Sertrice Shipley is the CEO & Founder of [Plan to Action](#), a culture and inclusion consulting firm and the co-author of *Inclusalytics: How Diversity Equity and Inclusion Leaders Use Data to Drive Their Work*. Prior to leading Plan To Action, she made significant contributions as Co-Owner & Chief Consulting Officer of Mattingly Solutions. Her dynamic consulting has benefited clients like the National Association of Women Business Owners, Koppers, and American Humane, delivering comprehensive culture solutions ranging from strategic planning to employee listening assessment to learning and development. A respected inclusion and culture thought leader and public speaker, Sertrice has been invited to speak at prominent events like the Society for Human Resource Management, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and various city Chamber events across the United States. Beyond her professional endeavors, she is deeply committed to community service and sits on various boards. Sertrice is located in Raleigh, NC with her husband Abraham and dog Winston.

If your organization is looking to take the next step, we've put together a resource outlining the key differences between mentorship and sponsorship: [Download the Free Guide](#)

If you would like to have one of your articles featured in **Success by Association Live** or have interest in sponsoring please contact Madi today at madi@aencnet.org.

