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Do you need a Godfather at your workplace? (Guest Article)

By Aparna Sharma, Director-HR UCB India Private Limited

In today's world, competition is tough and people ambitious. Everyone wants to move up the corporate ladder in the shortest possible time. Do they need a Godfather to make their dreams come true or can they move ahead on their own steam are some of the issues that this article seeks to explore.

A Godfather is one who ensures that you make the right moves within the organization, covers up your shortcomings but highlights your strengths, uses the old boys network for your benefit. In every organization, merit matters but having someone who protects and guides you, helps tremendously. In some organizations, certain functions are dominated by members of a certain community or people hailing from a certain state. A Godfather could make you part of that network and assist in your growth.

In the West, being part of the old school/university and old boys/parents network works very well. However, it is more subtly done.

Can you succeed without a Godfather? I spoke to a senior professional in the Financial Services business who came to Mumbai from Orissa about fifteen years ago. He said, 'I never had a Godfather and did not feel the need for one. You need luck, lots of hard work, humility and limited ambition - meaning always climb the corporate ladder gradually for sustainable success. For him, luck means being at the right place at the right time, saying and doing the right things'.

This is what another lady professional who, over a career worked with foreign banks and retail companies had to say. "I never had a Godfather at any time, but I have been lucky to have had mentors & well wishers along the way, in fact a couple of them".

My perspective is that, when one is at the Entry or Junior Management level, any senior management support looks like a "Godfather" in some way. It's definitely important to have Senior Management support. Sometimes, its one individual- a Manager or a manager's Manager, sometimes its more than one. The support gives that added push and visibility at this level.

As one gets into Middle Management- having the right network & visibility become critical, as one is competing against the best and one has to take a leap into the Senior Management level. Therefore, it may not be from just one Godfather or Godmother- but probably a



network of supporters. Networking skills become extremely significant from this phase onwards in one's career.

At a Senior level, it's risky to have any one Godfather. As Leadership changes, getting typecast can be dangerous. Alignment to Senior Leadership or Executive Committee is important, but building a strong perception of being One Leader's "God Child" may be harmful in the long run.

More than having a Godfather, having visible support from leaders is important.

In organizations, where work is driven by individuals with certain skill sets, a Godfather can be of limited help. If you work on graphics in a news channel, the quality of your work is for all to see and decide. Come across as a sensible, mature and innovative professional.

Universally, this is the best way to market your self.

Some people confuse Godfather and Mentoring. Now is a Godfather a Mentor? A Godfather is usually at a senior level- having spent years in the company, knows how the organization works and protects you from others. On the other hand, a Mentor may not be very senior but can help in your career greatly through training, guidance and sharing practical experiences with you about the organization. It also includes playing the role of a counsellor that is critical in important situations.

So do you go out searching for a mentor? In an article titled 'Indra Nooyi's mantras for success' she said "Let mentors find you. If you ask someone to be your mentor and they agree, then they probably aren't going to push you as hard as someone who is grooming you for the next level".

A mentor is a person you are comfortable with, someone who does not pass judgment on you, someone who can integrate professional life and personal concerns.

So the question is, do you need a Godfather? Perhaps not, in today's changing times.

By Aparna Sharma, Director-HR UCB India Private Limited

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