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THE JUNGLE | Focus on Recruitment, Pay and Getting Ahead

Finding Anchors in the Storm: Mentors

BY TODDI GUTNER

Last fall, nearly two years after Brian Padworski began his career as an audit associate, he asked a colleague at KPMG to be his mentor. "The economy is not where it was a year ago, especially in the last three months, and having a mentor helps you," says Mr. Padworski, 23, who was looking for ways to shore up his future.

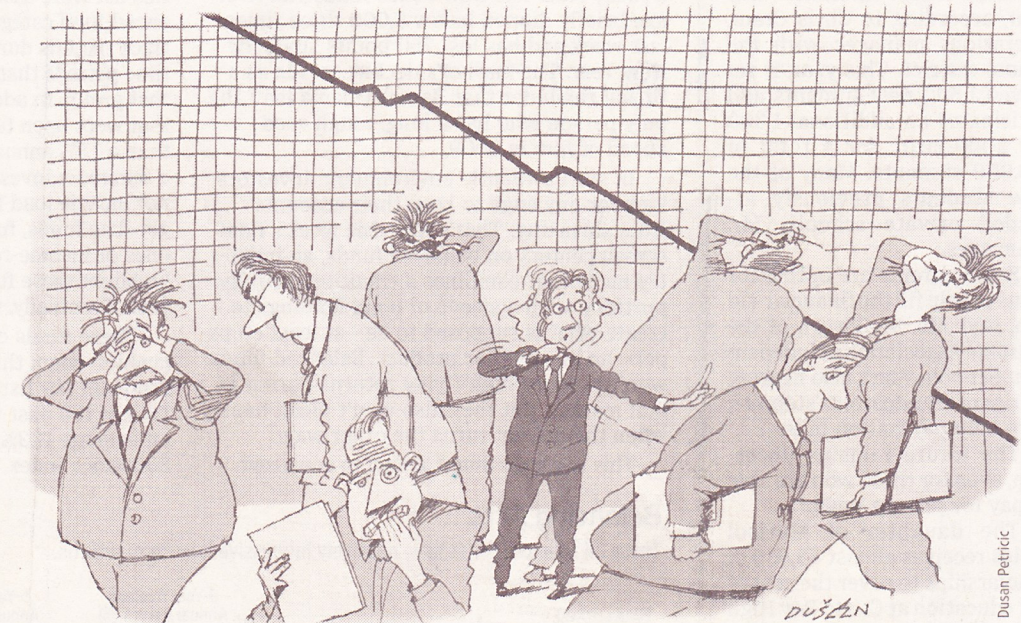
Mr. Padworski's mentor has encouraged him to become more aggressive, volunteer for extra assignments and to earn his CPA designation. "He helps me to assess my skills [and] gives me a better idea of how to get to the next level," says Mr. Padworski.

Known for frequently changing jobs either because senior managers haven't invested the time to engage them or because they haven't felt committed to their companies, workers in the millennial generation (born between about 1978 and 2000) have an incentive for staying put now: a shrinking job market. Indeed, employment experts say they're seeing fewer millennials ready to make a leap simply because they aren't receiving enough attention.

"Most young professionals never planned on staying in their first job for more than two years," says Terri Scandura, a management professor and dean of the graduate school at the University of Miami.

Finding that they can't move as easily from job to job, these young professionals will have to adjust to the new reality of working in one place for the long haul. To do so, they have to find ways to connect with senior managers in a less-needy way and actively seek out mentors. "Without as many opportunities ... mentoring becomes a more strategic avenue for career development," says Beth Carvin, CEO and president of Nobscot Corp., a retention-management consulting firm in Honolulu.

Yet with layoffs throughout corporate America—and more



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likely to come—how does an eager young professional connect with managers who are overworked, understaffed and stressed out? The best place to start is with the resources an employer already offers. "Most employees are surprised to discover that their companies have mentoring programs that they didn't even know about," says Ms. Carvin.

About 70% of Fortune 500 companies offer mentoring programs. The human resources or training and development department at your company can tell you what's available. At **International Business Machines**, for example, every employee is assigned a "connection coach" before their first day; after they join, workers are assigned a formal mentor.

Still, finding and developing a relationship with a career sage takes more legwork than it did during boom times. During economic upswings, managers feel positive and less hassled about taking on a mentee. You need to be more thoughtful and strategic when times are tough. First, take a personal inventory of your mentoring goals. What would you like

to gain? Do you want to learn more about project management? Are you interested in learning about the people side of the business? Do you want help navigating corporate politics? Make a prioritized list of your goals.

Armed with a good understanding of what you're trying to achieve, seek out a colleague who has those skills or experiences you would like to acquire. "But be very careful about whom you select," says Ms. Carvin. Try to get a sense of how the person you would like as mentor sees the process; ask someone who knows their style.

You should also consider whether the potential mentor can guide you on the path you'd like to follow. The Women's Alliance at **Xerox** uses Mentor Scout, a Web-based automated mentor-matching program, to help connect young employees with higher-ups. The program came up with a number of matches for Carole Bakhos, a 25-year-old electrical engineer at the company. She says she chose a mentor "who started as an entry level engineer and is

now a vice president of marketing," because Ms. Bakhos plans to also segue out of engineering.

Remember, mentoring is a two-way street—even more so during a recession. You're much more likely to work well with someone if "you're seen as someone who understands the pressures [a manager is] experiencing," says Thomas J. Delong, an organizational behavior professor at Harvard Business School.

Consider teaching a mentor how to use Twitter, setting up a page on Facebook or helping a manager figure out how to get the most out of a LinkedIn page. And take stock of skills you have that match your mentor's workload.

Then approach your potential counsel in a way that offers help. You can tell a respected manager that you admire his work and ask him to coach you on specific things like how to close on a big sale or how to engage colleagues on a project. In return, offer up a skill you have to help on a project he's responsible for. "A short-staffed, smart manager today will take all the help they can get," says Ms. Scandura.