

Why graduates need mentors

GUIDANCE: WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW

➔ **Meeting face-to-face with your mentor is important.**

Students completing their studies this year will soon find themselves having to face the real world and some of its harsh challenges.

One of the major questions arising at this stage is “what next?”

An education expert says although this appears to be a simple question, it is a loaded one, compounded by indecision, too many options, too few options and inexperience.

“And this is why the best move you can make right now is to find a mentor,” says Wonga Ntshinga, senior head of programmes at The Independent Institute of Education (IIE), SA’s largest and most accredited private higher education institution.

With IIE’s major focus on helping graduates prepare for the working world and getting their foot in the door, it has become clear the what next question is a persistent headache for overwhelmed graduates, he says.

“Although you are probably already looking through newspapers and online career portals searching for a job, one of the best things you can do for yourself at this point is to find a mentor in your industry,” says Ntshinga.

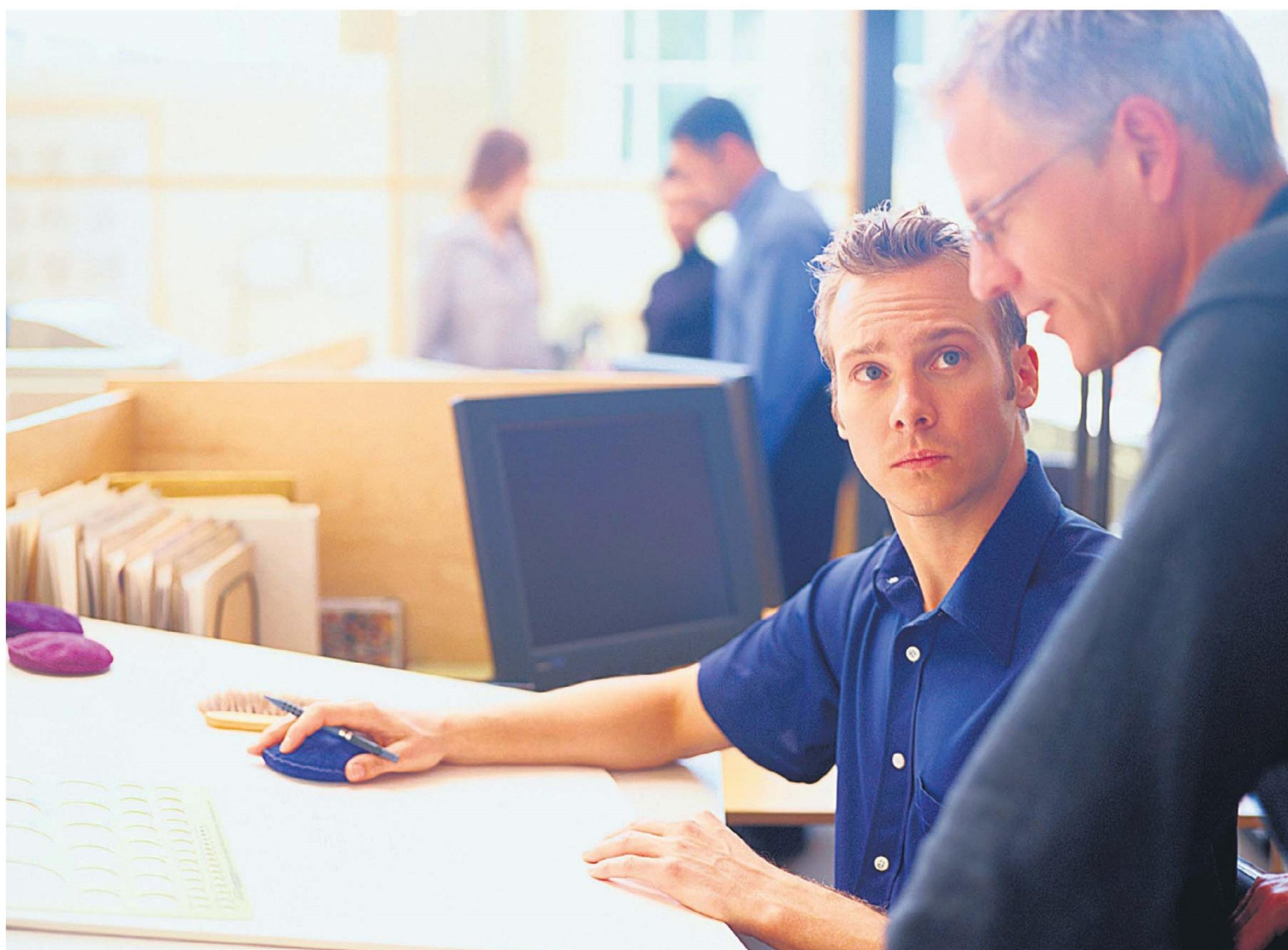
“Throughout life, people rely formally and informally on others to learn, grow and gain experience. Elders often fulfil these roles in communities and families. For career development, you need similar support, but from a professional who has already walked the path you are about to embark on,” he says.

“The benefits of mentorship are well-known and some organisations and companies have formal mentoring programmes. However, many do not, and in that instance, it is up to you to find a suitable mentor to guide and support you through good times and the bad.”

Ntshinga says mentors are ideally positioned to help young graduates with practical, industry-specific advice, whether it be skills or career options. But where to start looking for a mentor?

Through your higher education institution

“Some work-oriented institutions have mentorship programmes. If your institution has such a pro-



Many of history’s most successful people were mentored, including great names such as Martin Luther King Jr and Richard Branson

Wonga Ntshinga
Independent Institute of Education

gramme, enrol as soon as possible, so you can take the same relationship through with you to the workplace.”

Through professional bodies

“Most industries have professional bodies. Join these bodies through social networks, online programmes and networking events. Subscribe to an industry-specific mentoring programme. Or get involved with the industry community, which will allow you to identify someone with both the knowledge and

experience you seek.”

In your new job

You can also seek a mentor as soon as you find a position, says Ntshinga.

“This further offers a great opportunity to stand out during the interview process, by asking the panel whether they have a mentorship programme or similar opportunities.”

Ntshinga says there are a number of ways a mentorship can be conducted, including:

Regular face-to-face sessions

Meeting face-to-face with your mentor is important, as regular contact can ensure things get done.

Phone calls and e-mails are convenient, but in-person consultations ensure engagement and drive participation more efficiently, says Ntshinga.

Online sessions

There are plenty of online tools which can both help you find a professional mentor and enhance

the mentorship process, says Ntshinga.

Formal or informal sessions

“Some organisations have left mentoring in an informal structure, while other organisations are now taking the approach of measuring the success of these programmes via structured mentorship programmes,” says Ntshinga.

“Increasingly, companies are formalising mentoring programmes, with policies, mentor screening, training and development.”

Ntshinga says when looking out for a prospective mentor, graduates should find someone senior – at executive level – a consultant or teacher, someone in middle or upper management, or in research.

“You need to find someone who is able to make time for you, who is able to listen and communicate effectively and, above all, is willing to share knowledge and motivate you. In short, a mentor is someone who is nurturing, protective, honest and has a balanced perspective.”

On the other hand, as a mentee, graduates must also possess certain skills set, he says.

“You must be positive, have a passion for learning and be willing to take advice. You must be welcoming of constructive criticism in order to gain knowledge from your career mentor.”

Ntshinga says the benefit of having a mentor early in one’s career can not be stressed enough.

“Many of history’s most successful people were mentored, including great names such as Martin Luther King Jr, Richard Branson and Alexander the Great. Even Napoleon Hill – the renowned author of literature on personal success – was mentored. Mentoring provides you with a solid and informed support structure.”

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