

POSTED ON 16/08/06

CAREER DIRECTION

Rookies could use a little coaching, too

Used to structure, feeling more pressured than their parents, twentysomethings are hiring coaches to help navigate the waters of early working life, **REBECCA DUBE** writes

REBECCA DUBE

Nancy Tavares-Jones was 27 and unhappy at work. She didn't hate her job in a government real estate office -- she just didn't love it.

"Well, nobody really likes what they do," friends and family told her. But after four years and thousands of dollars spent on university, Ms. Tavares-Jones says, "I just thought there would be more to it."

Like many twentysomethings, Ms. Tavares-Jones agonized over what to do. Was the geography she'd majored in her true passion? Was her apathy about her career just part of growing up? Or did she need to make a drastic change?

Unlike most twentysomethings, she decided to seek answers with the aid of a professional. "I had heard there was some beast called a career coach that could help me out," she says.

Print Edition - Section Front

[Enlarge Image](#)

Using a phone book, she called on Toronto career coach Shirin Khamisa, who guided her through a series of questionnaires and conversations about her career. In their fifth session, they discovered what Ms. Tavares-Jones really wanted to do with her life. Now she's going back to school for a new career while still working at her real estate job.

"I feel like I have a better sense of direction," Ms. Tavares-Jones says.

Ms. Tavares-Jones is one of a growing number of young people turning to professional coaches to help them find a job, keep a job or just figure out what they want to do with their lives.

Forget experimenting with different careers or idly wandering though their first few years in the work force -- this generation wants answers. As coaching over all grows in popularity, young people who in the past may have turned to family, teachers or clergy members for advice now have a new option.

Experts say twentysomethings feel more pressure not to make mistakes than their parents did, and they're also accustomed to more structured environments.

After a lifetime of ballet lessons, soccer camps and tutoring, hiring a coach to help navigate the rough waters of early adulthood doesn't seem so odd.

Although the typical coaching client is still a mid-career professional climbing the ladder, about one-third of Ms. Khamisa's clients are in their twenties.

"They may have, or their parents may have, invested quite a bit of money in their education, and that may cause quite a lot of anxiety and frustration," says Ms. Khamisa, owner of Careers by Design. "They just feel like there's too many options and choices and they don't know how to move forward."

Ms. Khamisa says "the clients I see are well-educated; typically, they have at least one university degree, they're tech-savvy and they're very proactive."

But their book smarts sometimes fail to help them. Ms. Khamisa recalls one young motivated and ambitious client who routinely refused assignments from her boss if she felt the work wouldn't contribute to her personal development. Unsurprisingly, her career wasn't going very well.

"She was very focused on her own goals and didn't realize that she was now part of an organization, part of a team," Ms. Khamisa said. "It was a classic example of early work experience and not understanding how things work and how to move ahead."

Vancouver life coach Laura North has also noticed an increase in the number of young clients. She recently coached a woman in her mid-twenties feeling disillusioned in her first "real" job after spending a year abroad. She kept the job, Ms. North says, but coaching changed her attitude about work.

"It's rarely about the job," Ms. North says. "It's almost always about what's going on internally with the person."

Sharing their innermost hopes and fears comes naturally to the current crop of twentysomethings, who grew up under the influence of Oprah and Dr. Phil.

"The previous generation, I'm sure they wouldn't seek that out," says Michele Caron, an Ottawa-based life coach.

"Young people today are much more worldly. They are more open."

Some see the interest in coaching as a confluence of two trends: a growing service economy, in which formerly personal tasks are outsourced to professionals; and the increasingly scheduled lives of young people.

"They're much more programmed. Their lives have been planned out for them," says John Challenger, chief executive officer of outplacement consultancy Challenger Gray & Christmas.

Coaching fills that unstructured void after university for the young who feel adrift, Mr. Challenger says.

It is also part of the commercialization of relationships, he adds.

"We work and live in a time where we see a lot of manufactured, or synthetic, trust . . . Synthetic mentors like a coach may substitute for or be a complement for the mentorship of a parent, an aunt, an uncle, a teacher, a minister," Mr. Challenger says. He adds that synthetic isn't necessarily bad -- young people do need mentors.

The demand for coaching is also fuelled by the fact that the transition to adulthood is taking longer these days, says Abby Wilner, co-author of *Quarterlife Crisis* and *The Quarterlifer's Companion*.

"We are job-hopping and getting married later and paying off mounting debt due to the increasing costs of education and housing," says Ms. Wilner. Exploring options after university can be healthy, she says, as long as young adults are prepared for uncertainty.

Ms. North says younger people are her favourite clients because they're more open to sharing information about themselves than older people, and more enthusiastic about considering new options.

"They're still in a fairly idealistic stage in their development and looking for answers in a different way than older people."

Younger clients also react differently to coaching than older people, she says, simply because the experience of discussing their future with someone who's not a parent or teacher is such a novelty. "So much of coaching is really listening to people. In your early twenties, you get told so much, it's refreshing for people in their twenties to have somebody really listen to

them."

Ms. Caron says she thinks young people are being smart by seeking out coaching at the beginning of their careers, rather than waiting until they encounter problems in their 40s. "They're looking ahead and saying: 'I don't want to make the wrong choice.' "

For Ms. Tavares-Jones, hiring a career coach required some scrimping, but she believes the six-session investment in her future was worth it. She's now studying to become certified in a rapidly growing field that she and Ms. Khamisa determined was perfect for her -- career coaching.

"My interests are helping people discover who they are," she says. ". . . We kind of had a giggle about that."

In your corner

As more young people turn to career coaches, here are some tips from the experts:

Have a clear sense of what you want out of coaching sessions. Are you looking to move ahead in your job? Switch careers? Decide whether to go back to school?

Don't expect a coach to hand you the answers. It's more about asking questions, and it takes work on the client's part.

Remember that coaching isn't therapy. Emotional healing is not the goal.

Coaching also isn't a quick fix. Expect to devote at least three to six months to the process.

To find the right coach for you, interview several in person or over the phone. Ask them to describe their approach and their philosophy to see if their style is compatible with your goals. Ask about training and experience, including certification, areas of expertise, track record and background.

Ask if they have their own coach. Life coach Laura North says this shows a commitment to their own growth and helps keep their skills current.

© Copyright 2006 Bell Globemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The above has been excerpted from the Globe and Mail. The Globe and Mail is a division of Bell Globemedia Publishing Inc.