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Media Career Management 101

It's no secret that jobs in media represent some of the most sought-after employment opportunities across Canada. At present, there are some 40 accredited Canadian institutions relating to film and television that will be churning out scores of graduates this spring, with degrees in everything from animation and post-production to screenwriting and producing. The big question is: who's going to employ them all? And, just like the fresh faces about to graduate, so too exist hundreds of displaced media managers and experienced producers competing for the same opportunities.

Colleges communicate with our industry through advisory boards - typically comprised of representatives from small to medium-sized independent prodcos and production service companies, as well as the networks. Colleges use this expertise to enhance curriculum and to equip students for their burgeoning careers. And while we must recognize the contributions of the many participants in this process, perhaps there's a case for greater long-term planning and, in an ideal world, identification of best-hiring practices across our sector, matched to industry demand.

Across our media colleges and the related spectrum of training programs, the greater emphasis is always going to be on technical and production skill sets, getting students up-to-speed on how to make good television, and less emphasis on how to launch concerted careers with targeted areas of specialty and strategies for continuous employment or successful entrepreneurship in our margin-driven industry. And seldom is there overt acknowledgement of the sheer volume of graduating students and whether the media labor marketplace can support the bulk of them. And that's just the small picture.

At this year's CFTPA Prime Time conference in Ottawa, one of the last forums to take place focused on training and mentorship. Challenges were readily apparent - only a handful of hiring managers and decision-makers from the broadcasting and educational community showed up. A group of alumni from the CFTPA's National Mentorship Program were there to laud its effectiveness, but one wonders where the bulk of the remaining graduates are? The panel was informative and heartening overall, but might have benefited from representation from some of those who are about to graduate, in order to get a better idea of the concerns facing them in their upcoming employment searches, and to bring those issues to the fore. But then, their concerns would have fallen on deaf ears, with the hiring managers notably absent.

Then there's the bigger picture. The emerging talent- at the panel seemed unaware of - or unconcerned about - ongoing training, and made no mention of lifelong learning, continuing education or professional development. For the most part, it was a done deal - 'we have our placements now - everything's fine.'

So it's back to the advisory drawing board. Improved curriculum and basic skills are one thing, but is there a plan for the long-term wellbeing of these students, and trend monitoring, which would provide guidance to the sheer number of graduates? Most entry-level talent has little understanding of the depth and breadth of professional development programs available (or expected) within our industry, and only a small percentage is actively planning a long-term career.

This is a necessity in a knowledge-based industry facing an intense degree of attrition in the next five years.

And the training is there. The problem is that the emerging talent doesn't know where to go to find it, or even, why they should. This is where the advisory boards can step in - to help students navigate through the substantive offerings of existing fellowship, scholarship, social benefits, mentorship programs, professional



development and career opportunities readily available across our industry. For education-sector partners, meanwhile, the simple challenge is to ensure the information and resources are made available and communicated.

The timing is perfect for colleges, production stakeholders, training organizations and government agencies to develop new approaches to integrated training and hiring, and seek new ways to fortify our emerging talent for the challenges we all know our industry is facing. It's no secret that, despite its challenges, working within Canadian media is still incredibly attractive and rewarding by virtue of the content created, the culture upheld, and the intensely talented community we share. There is much talk of shaping our industry through training and succession planning, and we all want committed and continued growth for our maturing industry. But all the skills preparation and good intentions in the world won't address the painfully apparent missing link: media career management 101.

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