

OPCD Podcast: Episode 12 - “Finding a Workplace Mentor” (11/13/2014)

Interview with Ms. Shanna Ullmann, *Director of Engagement for the Harbert College of Business*

Voiceover: So you remember we mentioned the importance of finding a mentor? If the thought that “that might be easier said than done” crossed your mind - stay tuned, you’ll wanna hear this!

A good mentor can help with everything from problem solving to personal growth, but there are a few things to keep in mind as you look for someone to fill that role. Mrs. Shanna Ullmann is the Director of Engagement here at the Harbert College of Business. Last week she gave us the four steps to managing a successful career and she’s back with us this week to zero in on that first step. The process of finding someone to help guide you through being a new professional.

S. Ullmann: When you’re just starting an internship or a new job the importance of finding a good mentor that’s willing to help you develop and grow professionally can not be stressed enough. Imagine what it would have been like if you were expected to learn how to swim or how to drive a car all by yourself. That would definitely be a challenge and make the process much more difficult. So it’s the same way in starting a new internship or a new full-time career.

Voiceover: So let’s start with the basics. What do I need to look for in a mentor and how can I identify the best person to approach?

S. Ullmann: Some things you need to think about when you’re looking to find someone who can help you in this area, first you want to take the time to find someone who is well-connected in the organization. Someone that can help you learn both the formal and the informal networks that exists within your company. Second, you want to find a mentor that can use your help and trust that you are capable of doing a good job so that you can mutually make each other look good. Third, you want to select a mentor who shares similar values with you, someone you can trust explicitly, someone who you communicate well with. And lastly, find a mentor that not only has the experience in assisting their mentees, but someone that also has the time and energy to devote to you to help you become more successful.

Voiceover: Okay so in four simple steps, I now know what to look for. But this process is by no means one-sided. I’ve found a prospective mentor, now it’s up to me to be someone that this person would be interested in mentoring.

S. Ullmann: You want to think about things like demonstrate your ability to be successful. Mentors are always drawn to those who are new to the field that they perceive as already doing an excellent job. People who show motivation, who show initiative, who become involved in new projects and demonstrate their personal commitment to being

successful.

Voiceover: And, as is usually the case in the professional world, appearance and accomplishment go hand in hand.

S. Ullmann: I'm sure you've probably heard “dress for the job that you want, not the job that you have” and that is so true. It might not seem fair but we are always being judged by how we come across and how we look. So demonstrate that we are someone who has a commitment to the organization, that we take pride in our job, that we are willing to put ourselves out there as a professional not only in how we communicate but in how we present ourselves as well.

Voiceover: And while it's true - we're seeking out a mentor - we may be getting noticed as well. Others are always watching, so we have to be sure the work we do is nothing less than excellent.

S. Ullmann: You want to make yourself stand out in the organization by the projects you commit to and your personal desire to see them through. Professionals who have worked in the field for long time are always looking out for the next shining star and that's just how it is. Success begets success and, if you're someone who demonstrate your desire to be successful, people in your field will take notice of that. It may seem that the people at the top of an organization don't have time to notice new people just starting out, but nothing is really further from the truth. So once you're identified as someone who has committed and who has an awesome work ethic, then higher-ups within the organization will tend to seek you out to work on projects.

Voiceover: And last but not least: when it comes to developing a successful mentor - mentee relationship, don't let a difficult task be a deterrent and never be afraid to learn something new.

S. Ullmann: Your commitment to learn new things that will help you develop professionally is what's going to draw a mentor to you since they too will believe that your someone who is going to go far in the organization.

Voiceover: So now we know who to look for, where to find them and the best way to show that we're worth the time and knowledge they have to invest. And remember, the idea of mentorship is by no means limited to those just entering the workforce.

S. Ullmann: As we mature in our career, a mentor can remain a really valuable asset for us. It's not just when you're first starting your job to have somebody for the first six months or for the first year. You really want somebody who's going to stay with you over the long haul. I even tell people who have been in their careers fifteen, twenty, more years than that - find a mentor. Find somebody, there's always somebody out there with

more experience than you and someone who has more knowledge, a little bit more wisdom.

Voiceover: On the flip side of that, there's no such thing as getting started too early either. If you'd like to get a jump on building relationships with professionals while you're still a student then the Office of Professional and Career Development is a great place to start. The Mentorship Program offers the chance to do just that and more information is available in Lowder 101 or at harbert.auburn.edu/opcd. I so appreciate Mrs. Ullmann sharing her insight with us today here on the Harbert College OPCD Podcast. We'll be back with you next week and I hope you have an awesome rest of your day. See ya soon!