



# Helping newcomers take on challenges

By STEVEN RAYSON

Remember the day I got the e-mail. I was at Deloitte and had already enjoyed volunteering in some of their great community initiatives, like Impact Day and Junior Achievement. This particular e-mail caught my eye because I was looking to make a deeper impact.

It was from the Mentoring Partnership, an organization that provides new Canadians with mentorship as they search for work in the business and accounting fields. I responded to the e-mail, not knowing whose mentor I would be. All I knew is that my role would be to provide support and professional advice and to help my mentee find meaningful work in the accounting field as quickly as possible.

About a month later, I was matched with my mentee, a woman from Myanmar (formerly Burma). Her name was Htee (pronounced as Tee). Htee had been in Canada for about six months when I met her. She is bright, hardworking and worldly, having been educated in both her home country and Singapore. She had previously worked in Thailand and Hong Kong in various accounting support roles. She arrived in Canada with her husband, whose employer had transferred him to Toronto. Now she wanted to find employment in her field. Although she already had a wealth of experience, I saw my role as helping highlight her most transferable skills to prospective employers.

Our first task was Htee's résumé. Htee had good experience, but her résumé was a bit too detailed. I worked with her to highlight the skills that would be in demand with prospective employers. I believed she would be a good manager who could report to a CFO, so I tried to highlight those functions that showed she could manage different functions and aspects of internal accounting on a day-to-day basis.

The work we did together was Socratic. For example, I would say, "Htee, I need to know a bit more about this, can you tell me about it?" She had some homework to do. A week or two later, she'd return with that work done. In this manner, we worked with each other until her résumé was in stellar shape.

During our meetings, I kept detailed notes about what I asked her to do and what our next steps would be in order to ensure there was the appropriate follow-up from both of us. We were supposed to meet for an hour, but it usually ended up being more than that. We got together outside my work hours, though I did not mind as I found these meetings rewarding and meaningful. I began to see us



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as a team and I was personally invested in Htee's success. I wanted her to find a position with a company that would allow her talents to shine and her to feel comfortable in her position and as a new Canadian.

Coming here and not knowing many people, the hardest part for Htee was networking and meeting people with whom she could connect. I encouraged her to connect with people and introduce herself to others. In one instance, I arranged a lunch with another work colleague and her mentee. Mentoring Htee through this process reminded me of when I had first started my

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*Steven Rayson, CBV, CFE*

career, when I first had to learn to network. It's a challenging prospect for anyone, but even more so when you are starting from scratch and English is not your first language.

Htee is a very intelligent person with a lot to offer and I had confidence in her. I encouraged her to ask questions and start connecting with others by having them talk about themselves. At that point, I explained that once the connection was made she should ask for people's contact information and permission to follow up later on. People in the accounting field tend to welcome these kinds of connections.

Then we practised interview skills. I had been with one firm for 10 years so I had not had recent experience in the area. But just from a common-sense perspective, I was able to help Htee make her communication skills as transparent and effective as possible.

I was able to do this, in part, because I am a chartered business valuator (CBV). We value businesses, both tangibly and intangibly and prepare reports based on

our findings. We're the only accredited valuation professionals in Canada, and our opinion about a specific topic or issue is accepted in court. As such, we have to have strong communication skills, especially when it comes to explaining processes and writing. So I was able to take my skills as a CBV — the communication skills most of all, the art of explaining things in a clear manner — to help Htee polish her communication skills.

I was also attending several continuing education programs at this time, so I introduced Htee to the people there. It can be hard to put yourself out there when you're in a new culture and a new environment but Htee persevered.

We ended up working together for about six months, meeting about once a week. During that time, I found it inspiring to watch Htee become an even stronger communicator and a more confident job searcher. When I recently asked her what the most beneficial part of the mentorship was for her, she said, "receiving guidance from a mentor ... and getting to know about Can-

adian culture and norms."

I was very proud when Htee got a job about six months later. The job was at a non-profit organization in the accounting department. I have no doubt that she is a wonderful addition to their team.

Recently, Htee and her husband, who now live in Oakville, came over to have dinner with my family and me. We caught up about her position and the other gains she has made. It is gratifying to see her thrive.

I am so pleased to have been Htee's mentor and to have contributed to her success.

*Steven Rayson is a chartered business valuator and certified fraud examiner and has extensive experience with private companies in the areas of business and intangible asset valuations, litigation support and fraud. His experience includes 15 years with public accounting firms prior to commencing his own practice in December 2012. For more information about the Mentoring Partnership, visit [www.thementoring-partnership.ca](http://www.thementoring-partnership.ca)*