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## Graduates who need a coach to find a career

By Rebecca Knight

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Grant Adams had always planned on a career as a professional American football player. A star wide receiver at Boston College, he was drafted by the Philadelphia Eagles the summer after he graduated. But after pulling his hamstring and spraining his ankle during pre-season practice, he was cut from the team.

"It was then that I realised that I should probably start thinking about jobs in the corporate world," says Mr Adams. "But I felt like I needed a refresher on how to go about it."

So he did what an increasing number of new college graduates are doing: he hired a professional career services firm to help him with his job search. "I feel like I am making a ton of strides," says Mr Adams, who is looking for work in financial sales. "I am learning how to interview and how to talk about myself to employers. I've realised that a lot of things I did playing college football - being part of a team, being competitive, dealing with high-pressure situations - is a lot like a job."

Career coaches have long been used by established professionals looking to make a job change. But today, newly minted college graduates (and their parents) have begun enlisting career counsellors and consultants to help them compete for entry-level jobs.

Hayden-Wilder, the Boston-based consultancy, has been in business for a little over 10 months and has already helped 150 students - including Mr Adams - make the leap from the classroom to the world of work. The firm offers several packages, costing from \$850 to \$2,950 depending on the number of sessions involved, designed to help new job searchers polish their curricula vitae and cover letters and develop interviewing and networking skills.

"Successful products have a brand story and the same is true for job candidates," says D.A. Hayden, a partner in the firm and a former marketer. "We work with clients to help them communicate the key messages of what they're about to employers." The goal, she says, is to help graduates "build a story out of their experiences".

Take a recent graduate whose primary work experience encompasses several summers as a camp counsellor. "Those experiences mean that, as a worker, they can handle a lot of responsibility, they are good at teamwork and they have leadership skills," says Ms Hayden. "So much of this is about presentation and learning how to talk about themselves in a compelling and engaging way."

Boston-based Frank Faggiano began a one-to-one career coaching service for recent college graduates three years ago and has since helped more than 35 graduates find their first jobs.

He says he tends to focus on liberal arts graduates "who don't have a clue what they want to do".

"A lot of what I do is build their confidence and give them encouragement," says Mr Faggiano, who charges between \$3,000 and \$6,000. "I am helping kids understand that they're better than they think they are."

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, a group of corporate recruiters and career counsellors, job prospects are up 14.5 per cent over last year for the latest crop of graduates. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for people over the age of 25 with at least a Bachelor's degree is 2.1 per cent.

In spite of these encouraging statistics, career coaches say today's college graduates have led programmed, structured lives and therefore need personalised attention navigating the job search.

**"This generation in particular is used to having one-on-one customized help. They have grown up with personal trainers and private tutors. This is a natural extension of that," says Christine Cookman, who with Jen Zobel Bieber runs Make The Leap, a career coaching service in Westchester, New York state.**

Still, some career experts are doubtful that these services are worth the cost. After all, points out Cynthia Parker, director of career services at Colby College in Maine, parents are spending extra for services that are available to students and alumni of most colleges and universities. "In most cases, students can go back to their school - either in person or in a virtual way - and get that extra help." They have already paid for it, since it was included in the cost of their education, she adds.

Ms Parker is worried that these services coddle new graduates by not allowing them to develop job-searching skills on their own.

"We have a generation of students whose parents are very involved in their lives and their schooling," she says. "It can turn around to bite them if there is always someone else taking the initiative."

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