

“FRANKLY, I WANT TO CHANGE THE NARRATIVE AND CHANGE THE GAME. MY GOAL IS TO TRY TO LEAVE THE WORLD A LITTLE BETTER PLACE THAN WHAT IT IS NOW ... FOR OUR GENERATION, IT'S INCUMBENT ON US TO MAKE THE [MENTORSHIP] OFFER WITHOUT BEING SOLICITED. — GEETA SANKAPPANAVAR, CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, GRAFTON ASSET MANAGEMENT

MENTORSHIP, GLASS TOWERS AND NOT-SO-GREAT MANAGERS

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Geeta Sankappanavar, co-founder and president of Grafton Asset Management, wasn't familiar with the concept of mentorship early in her career. She didn't have true mentors until she was well established in the financial industry, but now she's making up for lost time.

She has two mentors — one is a former investor and one is her co-founder at Grafton — and she mentors up-and-comers in her field.

“I do it in formal programs and I do it informally,” says Sankappanavar from her Calgary office. “If I'm asked to mentor, I do it. It doesn't matter if I'm busy or I'm tired, I do it. If not me, then who?”

While she sees the value in male-female mentorships, she's most passionate about mentoring other women.

“The playing field is still not level,” she says, noting that her firm employs a higher percentage of women — including executives — than most in her field. “So, if a woman ever reaches out to me, or I meet her in the workplace, I try to make an effort to see her again and also connect her with my network — both male and female.”

So, why does a busy executive, who travels the world to tell potential investors about Calgary's oil-and-gas industry, make time in her schedule for mentoring?

“Frankly, I want to change the narrative and change the game,” she says. “My goal is to try to leave the world a little better of a place than what it is now.”

With that in mind, she often offers to mentor people without even being asked.

“For our generation, it's incumbent on us to make the offer without being solicited,” says Sankappanavar, who is in her forties and grew up in the industry with few female role models.

Natasha Koifman, president of strategic communication and public relations agency NKPR, has also benefitted from mentoring and gives back by doing the same. She's aware that it

can take courage for a more junior person to request the support of a more established player. That's why she, too, will often make the first move.

“If you see someone and you just feel that they could benefit from your guidance, it's OK to go up to them and say, ‘I would really like to be your mentor,’” says Koifman, who started her Toronto-based agency 15 years ago. “It's not always up to the mentee to ask for your mentorship.”

While Koifman is a strong believer in the power of mentoring — she set up a mentorship program for employees at her agency — she's also a fan of sponsorship, which she describes as advocating on another person's behalf, and recommending them for new roles and opportunities.

“As women, we should perhaps be not just mentoring but sponsoring other women — putting them up for jobs — because I think men do a better job of that than we do,” she says.

According to Koifman, mentoring and sponsoring help keep her closely in touch with more junior people in her organization and her industry, and help her avoid feeling like she's in a “glass tower.”

“Just being with my team, I feel like I'm constantly being mentored, every single day, because I'm always learning,” she says. “Our industry is constantly evolving, and part of the reason we've had the



NKPR's Natasha Koifman is a strong supporter of both mentorship and sponsorship. TARA WEST PHOTOGRAPHY

a must-have to succeed. The vice-president, general counsel and chief communications officer at L'Oréal Canada has never been part of a formal mentoring program, although she's very proud of

me,” she says from her Montreal office. “There are some that I've wished to emulate and others I've not.”

Obviously, great managers can be an inspiration to everyone, but Petrolito sees value in some not-so-great managers she's had, too.

“I think I've grown much more as a person when I've had managers who were difficult,” she says. “I think it makes you understand your own value system and what kind of leader you want to be.”

She admits that if she had had mentors, she might have “understood certain things at an earlier age,” but says she wouldn't want to change how her career has progressed so far.

“I think all the tougher times and all the lessons that I've had to go through have brought me to this point,” she says. “So, I don't think I'd change anything.”

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success that we've had is because I'm in tune with what's happening at every level of my business and every level of our industry.”

While the power of mentorship is undeniable, Nadia Petrolito is proof that it's not

the mentorship program her company's foundation runs through its L'Oréal Canada For Women in Science program.

“I've had people who have marked me, or influenced me, more than mentored



L'Oréal Canada's Nadia Petrolito is proud of the mentorship program run by her company's foundation. SUPPLIED