How to keep journalism full of fresh talent? Mentoring, big and small.

By Lauren Krause
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When I graduated with a degree in communications in 2010, the job market in journalism was down. Way down. And as I saw this week during a frank lunchtime conversation, that reality hasn't changed much for current journalism students.

To soften a tough journalism job climate, my alma mater, Loyola University Chicago, hosts monthly brown bag lunches in the School of Communication. The goal: Introduce current journalism and communication students to recent Loyola grads working in the field. Our job-landing experience is fresher.

On Tuesday, I was that graduate, though I'll admit that when Loyola professor John Slania asked me to speak to current students, I was a bit stunned. I had no clue what kind of advice to impart or how I would explain my less conventional path into the newsroom.

Here was the reality for me: After months of job applications and frustration, I took a job outside my field of study and bided my time. It was a year before my current role -- Trib Nation coordinator -- was created. And it took all of that year of hard work, relationship building and work experience to become a good fit when opportunity struck.

What I learned most from my unconventional career path was to be flexible, adapt and -- as one or two of my coworkers would say: "Put yourself in play." I thought of their advice while answering questions and offering career path solutions.

Here's the thing, I told the students, there is no single path to follow. In a field of constant evolution and adaptation to new technology, new business models, and new stories, no two paths are ever the same.

The path you forge is your own and your motivation is what will propel you down that path. There were about 20 students in the room, one of those students interviewed me for the Loyola Student Dispatch.

My hope for these students is that they learn from their own experiences and find the determination needed to form their future careers in journalism.

After all, ferreting out the truth isn't a business for quitters.