There are many challenges to the unemployment that many designers face today. There’s the hunt for a new job. There are the inevitable financial decisions to minimize the impact of lost cash flow while you are looking. There are the emotional reactions that each individual has to face. At a less immediate level, there is also that nagging feeling that the longer you are away from real design work, the more stale you are going to look to a potential employer. And often, there’s the simple problem of what to do with the spare time.

Mentor Graphics has for some time been offering a potential solution to these last two items. The company is offering complimentary training courses to qualifying unemployed engineers. The courses include both live training in the company’s Public Training Centers and Web-based instruction. They are offered on an as-available basis, after you submit an application and get approval, as the above link describes. Do read it, as there are minimum qualifications for the whole program and for individual courses. In addition to the training, you get entry into a social networking group called the Displaced Worker Program Community.

Mentor’s Ry Schwark says that in the last year just over 450 engineers have taken at least one class through the program, so this is a going operation, not a passive nice idea. And there is a going community of engineers who have taken courses.

Granted, training and a job-search peer group aren’t magic bullets to put you in a job. But training can be a big help: by expanding your skill set, by keeping you current, and maybe just by helping with the feeling that you actually can do something about finding work in a dreadful market. Sometimes that is the most important, and most difficult, challenge. My hat is off to Mentor for trying to help.